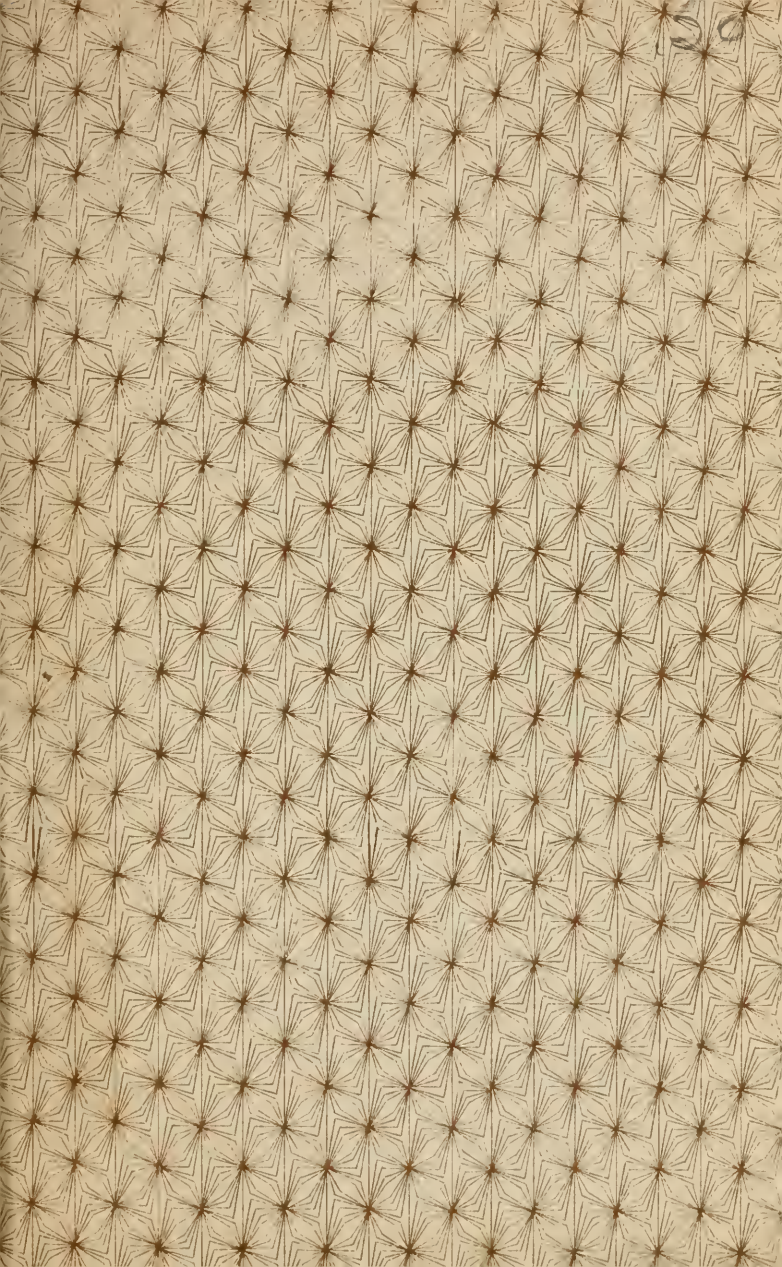






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FRONTISPIECE.

HER HUSBAND'S HOME.

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN,

AUTHOR OF

"LITTLE FREDDIE," "HIS MOTHER'S BOOK," "TWO LONDON HOMES," ETC.

"And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."—ISAIAH xxxii. 2.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—
HEBREWS xiii. 8.

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HER HUSBAND'S HOME;

OR,

The Durleys of Linley Castle.



CHAPTER I.

AN ENGLISH HOME.

SIR JOHN DURLEY and his mother sat at breakfast, one bright spring morning, in a spacious and luxuriantly furnished room in Linley Castle.

The baronet was a handsome man of only five-and-forty summers, and yet he wore a bowed-down look of ill-health which made him appear almost an old man. His finely-cut features were wasted and sunken, his penetrating dark eyes were hollow and unnaturally bright. His tall figure stooped as he walked, and his large frame could bear but little fatigue. When he and his mother paced the garden walks together, a spectator would find it hard to believe that the enfeebled man was son to his stately and upright companion.

Lady Durley, at sixty-eight, was a marvel of health and strength. She retained in a most wonderful way the beauty of youth, and combined with it a dignity and lofty bearing which no young woman ever possesses in the same perfection. There was no trace of unbecoming juvenility in Lady Durley. She dressed with scrupulous regard to propriety, and in person, as in manner and language, was the personification of stately, well-preserved old age.

The one great love of her life (for she was not a woman of much tenderness) was for her son, the present baronet, whose confirmed ill-health from childhood had rendered him an object of perpetual solicitude, and whose chronic malady had always kept him from all idea of marriage. To Lady Durley, this son, who had always been so especially her own, was the centre round which all her thoughts and hopes and wishes seemed to revolve.

They were sitting at breakfast this bright May morning, mother and son at either end of the long table, with its snow-white cloth, gleaming silver and fragrant hot-house flowers. She was slowly sipping her tea and reading a letter with languid indifference; he was looking at the *Times*, and as he read, he uttered a subdued exclamation indicative of surprise.

Lady Durley looked up at him.

"Did you speak, John?"

For a few moments he did not answer, and then he laid down his paper and showed a very grave face to his mother.

"Is anything the matter, John?"

"Lionel's regiment is ordered to India, I see," said he speaking slowly, "on active service."

There was a pause, which seemed significant, before anything more was said. Lionel Durley was the second son and Lady Durley's only other child. He was twenty years younger than his brother, and had never been a favourite with his mother. Five years ago, when but twenty, he had made a romantic and imprudent marriage with the daughter of his superior officer, a girl of seventeen: and his deeply offended mother had neither seen him nor written to him since.

Sir John corresponded from time to time with his brother; but, as Lionel and his wife had never been in England since their marriage, the question of a meeting at Linley Castle had never as yet had to be faced. Sir John, knowing his mother's feelings upon the matter, seldom or never spoke of his brother, or the unfortunate marriage he had made; and Lady Durley not unnaturally supposed that his views upon that subject were identical with her own.

"Lionel ordered to India upon active service—indeed!" she remarked after a short silence. "Well after all there is something satisfactory to my mind in active service. A soldier's life, as an ordinary thing, is full of temptations and snares. Lionel should make a good soldier. He comes of a soldier race."

Sir John made no response to these remarks. His face was grave and thoughtful; and Lady Durley talked on as if to cover his silence.

"Young men in my day were always delighted to be up and doing. It was those who were left behind who lamented their fate. Lionel no doubt is intensely gratified to change his life of inaction for one of excitement and possible glory."

"For himself, I have no doubt he is glad. He is

too much the soldier—too much a Durley to shrink from his duty. But there are two sides to every question. Lionel has his wife and child to think for.”

Lady Durley's brow contracted sharply.

“Your father left Lionel very well provided for,” she said. “His—his wife will be in comfortable circumstances enough. I suppose they have a sort of establishment of their own at Malta. She can remain there till his return.”

Lady Durley spoke with a slow and stately assumption of indifference; but she did not meet her son's glance, which was fastened upon her with a sort of surprised scrutiny.

“Mother,” he said slowly, “Lionel's wife is only twenty-two; she is, we have heard, very beautiful, and she has never had the advantages of education and training such as we should give our daughters. She has had a strange life, amid surroundings which are quite undesirable for a young girl. Do you think it fitting for her to remain in Malta without her husband? Would you like to feel that your daughter-in-law was occupying such a position?—for she is your daughter-in-law, little as you may be inclined to recognise the relationship. For my part, I feel, as head of the family, that I should be doing a great wrong in allowing my brother's wife to occupy so ambiguous a position.”

Lady Durley was touched here upon a tender point, that of family pride.

“Have you any other plan in your mind?” she asked, in preference to arguing against her better judgment.

“The only way I can see,” he answered quietly

and steadily, "is to telegraph at once to Lionel, telling him to send his wife and the boy here, to remain with us during the time his regiment is engaged in active service."

Lady Durley, with all her self-possession, could hardly retain her equanimity.

"John, you do not know what you are saying! You wish to have—to have—Mrs. Lionel Durley" (she always seemed to find it difficult to give a name to her daughter-in-law) "an inmate of Linley Castle! Impossible!"

"Why so, my dear mother?"

"It would not be fitting. *Noblesse oblige*," and here Lady Durley drew herself up grandly. "You can hardly expect your mother to receive, as a guest, a woman of that class."

"My dear mother," said Sir John again, "you may be quite sure that I will force upon you no measure incompatible with your sense of right. But at the same time, I must act towards my brother as duty to him dictates. In deference to your feelings I have never spoken needlessly upon the subject of Lionel's youthful and imprudent marriage; but I have made, nevertheless, a number of inquiries upon the subject, and I find that beyond its imprudence, no word can be breathed against it, and that it has been a very happy union from first to last. As to the character and antecedents of the lady, they are irreproachable. Colonel Gascoigne was a man of good family, and but for a financial misfortune would have been a man of property too. As it was, he was poor, too poor to send his daughter away to England to be educated, as he should have done; and they were

devoted and almost inseparable companions. Her desolation at her father's death, drove Lionel to the expedient of marrying her out of hand (they had been several months engaged at that time) and the poor girl was too bewildered and trusting and sorrowful to refuse. They were married, and they have been happy and devoted to one another ever since. They have one little boy, four years old. I assure you, mother, that although this poor girl has had very strange experiences and a very different life from anything we have known, that there is nothing either in her birth or antecedents for which we need blush. We shall best show how *noblesse oblige*, by receiving her as a daughter of the house during Lionel's enforced absence."

Lady Durley, though a woman of strong prejudices, was high-principled and not ungenerous. Moreover, she had sagacity to know how much to say upon a subject and how much to leave unsaid. She knew too that Sir John, when his mind was made up, was immovable, and that he had an unswerving determination always to do his duty in whatever form it came to him; and if he believed duty bid him welcome under his roof his brother's young wife, why he would do it at all costs, and words were worse than wasted.

Lady Durley, who idolised this son, would have sacrificed more than prejudice to avoid a difference with him; but to invite Lionel's wife as a guest to the Castle for an indefinite time was a very severe sacrifice for her pride to make.

She could not but speak coldly, as she said, after another long pause,

"Well, John, if it must be, it must. I will say no more upon the subject. I am glad the young woman is less objectionable than I feared."

Sir John looked at his mother with an odd mixture of pleading and gravity upon his pale face and in his hollow eyes.

"I am afraid you do not like the arrangement, mother?"

"No, John; I must candidly confess that I do not," she answered.

"But your judgment agrees with mine, that it is the most kind and wise and right course that could be adopted under the circumstances?"

After a brief struggle with her pride, Lady Durley made answer.

"At least I will try to think so."

"Thank you; and you will make her welcome at Linley?"

The answer was only coldly spoken.

"I will do what I can."

Sir John looked down at his plate as he said, "She is very young. She cannot but be very lonely without her husband. She has never known a mother's loving guidance and care—and then she is a Durley you know."

"I am afraid I shall find it rather hard to realise that," said the stately dame with a certain grimness of expression.

Sir John rose from his place and drew nearer to her. When he spoke again it was more earnestly than before.

"Mother," he said, "we must face things as they are, without lamenting over the might-have-been."

Miss Gascoigne was not the wife we should have chosen for Lionel, but as he has chosen for himself we must make the best of it, and receive his wife as one of the family. You know, my dear mother, how very uncertain a life mine is. At any time Lionel might become the head of the house. In any case, his little boy is heir to all that belongs to the house of Durley. We cannot blind our eyes to these facts, even did we wish to do so. Then why not lay aside all vain regrets, and welcome this poor young wife as a daughter and as a sister? Do you not wish to hold your only grandson in your arms?"

He spoke both playfully and feelingly; but Lady Durley's face had contracted with pain. She knew but too well how uncertain a life was that of her favourite son, yet she could not bear to be reminded of the fact.

"If it were your son, John," she began; but he held up his hand as if to stay her further words, and she became silent.

"Mother," he said, "when soldiers are ordered to the front, it is impossible to say how many of them will return to tell the tale. If anything should befall Lionel, do not let us have to reproach ourselves with hasty words uttered unthinkingly about him or his."

Lady Durley's face softened somewhat.

"You are right, John," she said slowly. "He is my son and your brother; and I suppose under the circumstances his wife's place is with us. In case anything should go amiss—are you guardian to the boy?"

"I and his mother jointly."

"Ah!" Lady Durley sighed half wearily, half im-

patiently, "Well, John, I suppose you must send the telegram."

"In your name as well as my own I hope?"

"If you wish it—yes."

And with a lightened countenance Sir John Durley proceeded to invite and despatch his missive of invitation.





CHAPTER II.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE blazing sun of Malta was beating down mercilessly upon the white walls of the busy town, and upon the glassy expanse of blue sea beyond; but within a large and tastefully furnished room in a house a little on the outskirts, the blinds and awnings made a cool, green shade, very refreshing after the blinding glare without.

There were two occupants of this large room. One was a handsome little boy of four years old, who lay upon a rug, playing with, and babbling to, a soft-eyed, solemn-looking deer hound; the other was a very beautiful woman, who looked almost too young to be the child's mother, although such in reality she was.

Lionel Durley's young wife was a woman of rare and almost dangerous beauty; but she had passed unscathed through the ordeal of a life exposed to many temptations; and love, the deep love of a noble nature, first for her father, then for her husband, had been the means of shielding her from all temptation to frivolity or any kind of evil.

The young wife looked very sad and listless as she lay back in her long bamboo chair, wrapped in deep

and melancholy thought. Her fair face was very pale, and the beautiful, wistful grey eyes looked heavy with unshed tears. And even as she sat still in silent thought, two drops escaped from between the long black lashes, and rolled slowly down her cheek.

With a hasty movement they were wiped away. Her husband might return at any moment, and he must not find her in tears. She—a soldier's wife!—she must never be a hindrance to him in the path of duty.

But the movement had not passed unobserved, and consolation was not far to seek. The dog rose and pushed a cold, damp nose into her hand in token of sympathy, and a baby voice at her knee said in coaxing tones,

“Mamsey, don't kye—me loves 'oo.”

With an impulsive movement the young mother caught up her child and strained him to her heart. This was a sufficiently unusual demonstration to elicit the remark,

“Mamsey *is* sorry. Tell Chap.”

This appeal to confidence was not rejected.

“Gascoigne,” answered she gravely, “Mother is sad because father is going away.”

The child's dark eyes looked up comprehendingly.

“Father going away,” he repeated gravely, “where?”

“Father is going to fight for the Queen, like a brave soldier,” was the answer, spoken half proudly half sadly.

Little Gascoigne's face expressed animated delight.

“Chap go too!” he cried excitedly. “Chap wants to be soldier too.”

“No, no, not yet, darling, not yet. My little boy must stay and comfort poor mother.”

The words ended almost in a sob, and the child put up his arms and clasped his mother tightly round the neck.

"Chap will take care of Mamsey," he said with a resolution beyond his years. "Mamsey mustn't kye any more."

What sense of comfort, almost of protection, there was in the clasp of those soft baby arms! The young mother breathed a blessing over the child she held so close to her heart.

There was a firm tread in the verandah without, and next moment Lionel Durley in military uniform, hot, dusty, and tired with his exertions, had entered the cool room, and was standing beside his wife and child.

"Why Eugénie, my darling, you have been crying," he said tenderly.

She looked up, smiling bravely.

"I will not cry any more if I can help it. Gascoigne is going to take care of me now."

"That is right, old chap," said Lionel, taking the child in his arms and speaking with an odd mixture of seriousness and playfulness. "Father is going away a long way off, and dear mother will miss him very much. Chap must be very good to her, and take care of Mamsey till father comes back."

"Chap will," answered the child with great resolution, and Lionel kissed him and set him down, bidding him run away and play with Ross, as he had a great deal to say to mother.

At this Eugénie lifted her eyes again, and Lionel, laying a caressing hand upon the rich masses of her rippling golden hair, said gently,

“I have had some good news, dearest.”

“Good news?” she repeated, for it seemed to her that no news could be good, so long as her husband was to be taken from her.

“Yes, it has relieved my mind from a load of anxiety. It has made all plain both for you and for me. I shall leave you now, my darling, though with a heavy heart, yet with a mind at rest.”

She looked at him with a surprised curiosity.

“You are speaking in riddles, Lionel. Tell me what has happened.”

“My people in England—my mother and my elder brother—wish you to make your home with them during my absence in India. They have telegraphed a warm and earnest invitation. I cannot express what a relief this is to me. I could not have left you here alone; and to you England is almost an unknown land. Now all will be well.”

A faint colour had risen in Eugénie’s face. She said slowly,

“Your mother—your brother. I hardly knew there were such people.”

Lionel Durley sat down beside his wife, and took her hand in his.

“I have been to blame perhaps—I am such a bad correspondent. I have known but little of what has passed at my old home since I entered the army, but it is never too late to mend, and nothing could better re-unite us than a visit from you and the child during the time that I am away.”

But Eugénie only said quietly,

“You know, Lionel, I am not a child now, as I was when I married you. I understand things now. It is

on my account that your people have quarrelled with you. I have been the cause of these years of silence."

"Indeed, my dearest, there has been no quarrel. I and my brother correspond regularly. I have no doubt they were astonished and perhaps a little scandalised by my early marriage; but we have never quarrelled. And now they are, of their own accord, inviting you on a visit. You see you are taking quite a morbid view of the case."

Eugénie smiled tenderly and sadly.

"You are very generous, Lionel—very tender and considerate for me; but I cannot blind myself to facts that are so patent. Had I known as much of the world, when I was left alone five years ago, as I do now, I think that not even my desolation, nor my great love, could have permitted me to allow you to make that great sacrifice which you did for my sake."

"Sacrifice!" cried Lionel, turning upon her a glance almost of reproach. "Eugénie, you hurt me by the use of such a word."

She looked at him with a world of feeling in her beautiful eyes.

"My love," she said, "my noble love, I know that the sacrifice was one of which you were generously unconscious; but I, your wife, who cannot but be jealous of your interests, I cannot be unconscious of the coldness between you and your own kin, of which I, and I only, am the cause."

"Have been, say at least, if you will have it so," answered Lionel with a smile; "for, as you see, it is already a thing of the past. You will be made welcome, dearest, at Linley Castle; and your sweet presence there will at once dispel all coldness or

distrust. Icicles, you know, Eugénie, cannot resist the sun's rays. When you and the child appear, you will carry all before you."

He spoke with proud, caressing fondness; but her face expressed a certain timid shrinking.

"Must I go there, Lionel? Do you really wish it?"

"My dearest, yes! Surely you cannot but see what a load it lifts off my mind to have you so well cared for. Eugénie, what is it?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing—I am foolish and nervous, that is all. I will do nothing you do not approve. I do not wish to act ungratefully; but oh, if I could only go to some little place of my own, never mind how humble, and have my child all to myself till—till you came back to us. I do so dread strange faces and strange ways. But indeed, Lionel, I will do as you wish."

His face was grave and tender and compassionate, and yet it was firm too, as he answered,

"My dearest child, I am very sorry you feel this. I do understand and I do sympathise with you: and yet I say that you must go to Linley Castle and make your home there during this campaign. Think, my sweet wife, and I feel convinced you will see that, for the sake of the child, if for no other reason, you ought to go."

"For the child's sake!" she repeated, looking across at little Gascoigne. "How can the matter affect him?"

Lionel drew his wife closer to him, so that her golden head rested upon his shoulder.

"My darling," he said gently, "I do not want to

pain you ; but let us both be brave and look the future in the face. You know that when a soldier goes on active service, there are perils to be faced which may "——

"Don't, Lionel!" she implored in a choking voice.

"My sweet wife, I would not say a word to pain you if I could avoid it; but we are not children. We cannot quite blind our eyes to the possibilities of the future. If—if I should not come back, our little boy would be direct heir to the title and the Durley estate,"——

"Your brother"—began Eugénie.

"My brother is unmarried and in very bad health. He has suffered all his life from an incurable internal malady, the nature of which I do not understand. His life hangs on a thread. Only the quiet, secluded life he leads has kept him alive all these years. He knows this as well as the doctors, and has told me many times how it is with him. Little Gascoigne ought not to be brought up alienated from those that bear his name. John has thrown out a hint, from time to time, that the child would be welcomed even by his mother to Linley; but such a visit has been out of the question before. Now, however, all is changed; you and he are both warmly invited. Linley Castle is a home which it is fitting you should know. And if"—he paused, but in a moment continued quietly and unfalteringly, "if anything should happen to me, it is right that you should be amongst those who bear my name, and that the boy should be brought up as befits his future standing in life. So long as my brother lives, you and he are joint guardians

of the child, should anything go wrong with me. At his death, under these circumstances, a great responsibility would devolve upon you, as sole guardian to the boy, to whom the title and estates would have passed. Nothing could so fit you for a right discharge of these duties, as a residence at Linley Castle during its present régime. We must think of all these things, my dearest. Life is too full of uncertainties for us to blind our eyes to possibilities. After all, it is thinking of trouble and facing it bravely which makes us able to be calm and resolute if ever it does overtake us; and it will not come any the sooner because it is talked of."

Eugénie made a gesture of assent. She had commanded herself, although with difficulty, during her husband's speech; and she spoke with creditable firmness when her turn came. She was too much the soldier's daughter and the soldier's wife to allow fears for the future to overmaster her.

"I understand you, Lionel. You are right, as you always are. I will go to your old home, and I will do what I can to win the regard of your relatives; but my ways will not be their ways, nor my thoughts their thoughts. You are blinded to my faults by your loving admiration; but they will not be blind. I fear I shall bring upon myself much reprobation and disgrace."

Lionel smiled, not understanding in his masculine mind the full bearing of his wife's position.

"John will not be captious at least," he said. "He is an excellent fellow, though he has always seemed more like my father than my brother. You will like him, Eugénie, and he will like you, I am convinced.

You will be sorry for him, for he suffers sadly at times, I believe."

"I am not much afraid of your brother," answered Eugénie quietly. "It is your mother whom I really dread."

"Ah! Well, you must put on as brave a face as you can, poor child. It is hard upon you having to face them all alone. I wish I could have taken you there. You will get used to Lady Durley in time. She is rather awe-inspiring at first, I admit, but the boy will be a link between you."

Eugénie was silent awhile. Her dread of her mother-in-law did not decrease.

"The life will be so different—so dull, so formal, I have never seen anything like it. I shall always be making mistakes."

"You will soon learn to avoid them. I am sure you will do nothing seriously amiss. Life goes by machinery at Linley. You will not be able to help doing exactly as every one else does. You will fall into your place directly—I know it of old—and once there, the difficulty would be how to get out, not how to stay in."

Lionel meant to reassure his wife, but Eugénie felt more and more depressed; yet she would not let her husband see it, and smiled bravely.

"And the boy?" she asked, "will he have a groove too, in the household machinery?"

Lionel looked round towards the child and smiled.

"Fancy the little chap playing in the big hall at Linley! I should like to see him! Ah, a child will be quite a novelty there! Old chap," he added crossing over to the boy, and tossing him in his arms,

“do you know you are going to your ancestral home, where it behoves you to comport yourself with the very greatest propriety and discretion? Poor old chap! How he stares! I wonder what his grandmother will say to him!”





CHAPTER III.

AN ARRIVAL.

LINLEY CASTLE, Fontbury, was commandingly situated upon the summit of a wooded hill, which overlooked a wide stretch of singularly beautiful scenery.

Two miles away, and many hundred feet below, lay the picturesque town of Fontbury, whose clustering red brick gables, together with the square, grey tower of the fine old abbey church, formed a pleasant feature in the still landscape, whilst the wide river, winding in and out, with many a twist and turn, and only losing itself in the far blue distance of wood and hill, seemed like a band of gleaming silver, connecting this quiet, lonely place with the great world that lay beyond.

The view from the terrace at Linley Castle was a source of pardonable pride to its owners; and it never looked more lovely than on a certain afternoon in May, when the trees were all clad with their tenderest tints of blended green, and the mellowed light began to tell of the approach of eve.

Lady Durley was seated in her own favourite chair upon the terrace; and beside her stood a small table bearing the customary afternoon tea-tray.

The terrace was a regular place of resort in the summer at Linley Castle. It was so sheltered, so warm and yet so well shaded by magnificent cedar trees, that it was almost as well protected as an in-door room, whilst combining with this the advantages and pleasures of the out-door world. Lady Durley, who had never known a rheumatic pain or a threatening of bronchitis, used this terrace during a large part of the year almost like a drawing-room.

She was sitting there now; but in spite of the luxurious, almost languid beauty of everything around her, she appeared alert, impatient, all but ill at ease.

She seemed to be listening intently, and she started at every sound; and from time to time she murmured to herself,

"I wish John had not gone to meet her. It was quite unnecessary. His place is here, with me."

At that moment Sir John Durley made his appearance, stepping from a window which opened upon the terrace, and leaning rather heavily upon his stick.

"Why, John," exclaimed his mother, "are you back so soon? Where is she?"

"I did not go after all," answered Sir John quietly. "I did not feel equal to the drive. Poor girl, I hope she will not feel neglected. I would have gone if I could."

His mother looked anxiously at him; but he was evidently not thinking of himself. The look upon his face seemed to give her some annoyance.

"I am sure Mrs. Durley is quite capable of taking care of herself, after her experiences of life," she said incisively. "It is quite enough that the carriage and the servants meet her."

"Poor child!" said Sir John again, in his slow, impassive way. "Just parted from her husband, and for no one can say how long. Lionel's letter was full of feeling and gratitude. We must try and make this dull old house as congenial as we can. I presume you will not address her to her face as Mrs. Durley, mother?"

"I really am ignorant of her Christian name," was Lady Durley's icy reply.

"It is Eugénie."

"I am sorry. I have a great objection to those fanciful French names."

"Well, the girl is not to blame for that. Besides there is something soft and pretty in the sound."

Lady Durley made no reply, but asked,

"And the boy, I suppose, is called John?"

"I do not know. Lionel always calls him the child, or the boy, or some such name. I really do not know what he was christened."

"It is sure to be John. The eldest son of the house has been called John for generations. I do not think that Lionel could so far forget all that is due to family tradition as to call him by any other name. He knows that you have no son to carry on the heirship."

Sir John smiled half sadly, half playfully,

"Ah, mother, we need not trouble our heads over trifles; after all, we all learn in our day that 'The old order changeth, giving place to new,' and that there will be, please God, a Sir Lionel reigning here before so very many more years have passed."

There was no time for Lady Durley to make any reply, for at that moment the staid old butler appeared,

followed by a young girl, with a little boy clinging closely to her hand; and they knew that they saw now before them Lionel's wife and child.

Sir John was one of the shyest of men, little as his composure of manner betrayed it. He would have given half his inheritance for the power to give a warm and cordial welcome to the fair young creature before him, to have played towards her the kindly elder brother's part which his age and position justified, and to have put her at ease by his own ease and friendliness.

As it was, her very beauty and grace embarrassed him. His warmth of feeling seemed to paralyse him. His mother's eyes occasioned him feelings of profound discomfort. All he could do was to advance slowly towards the advancing pair, hold out his hand, and say stiffly,

"How are you—Eugénie? We are very glad to see you. Let me introduce you to my mother."

For one moment the deep wistful eyes were turned to his, in a glance which seemed to go to his heart; but after one brief moment they were dropped again, and a low sweet voice answered,

"You are very kind, Sir John. I shall be very pleased."

He led her to his mother, feeling as if he would give all he possessed if only he could induce her to give a mother's welcome to this lonely stranger. She was a woman, she was not troubled by any feelings of diffident shyness. It would be but natural for her to take this newly-found daughter in her arms, and bid her welcome to a mother's love and a mother's sympathy. But would she do it? Sir John's in-

stinets all answered in the negative, and they answered truly.

Lady Durley gave Eugénie a frigid kiss, and said, "How are you, my dear? I hope you are not overtired by your journey. Pray take a seat. A cup of tea will refresh you."

Had she been speaking to a total stranger, the tones and words could hardly have been more formal and precise. Eugénie again spoke a few quiet words of thanks, and sat down where she was bidden without again lifting her eyes.

Sir John, with a sense of discomposure, that almost amounted to distress, sank down into his seat, and looked away into the hazy distance, and wished himself anywhere else.

Then recalling himself with a start, he turned and looked at the dark-eyed little boy, who now stood at his mother's knee, gazing about him with the gravity and curiosity of a child in a strange place, amongst strangers.

He was a very handsome little fellow, with the type of features which belonged to the race whose name he bore, and with a delicacy of colouring and a finish of contour which he evidently inherited from his mother.

Sir John had a quiet but intense love for children, the more intense perhaps for having none of his own, and his soul yearned over this little one, the only son of his only brother, and bound to him by a peculiar tie of interest.

He held out his hand to the boy and said,

"Will you come to me, little man?"

The child shrank back with instinctive reluctance—

Sir John's face looked very worn and old that day—but his mother said gently and firmly,

“Gascoigne, go and speak to Uncle John.”

Sir John smiled to hear the name for the first time in his life; and the smile encouraged little Gascoigne, who advanced at his mother's bidding, and held out a very small hand, which was gravely shaken.

“How do do do?” was the solemn question that issued from the little red lips.

Sir John stooped and kissed the child, and said turning to his mother,

“Is he not like what Lionel was at his age?”

Lady Durley was looking earnestly at the little boy. Her face had softened a little as she gazed, and now she said quietly,

“John, will you give grandmother a kiss? I suppose you have called him John?” she added, turning to the mother.

“No,” answered Eugénie in a low voice, “his name is Gascoigne. Gascoigne, come and kiss your grandmother.”

But Lady Durley had turned from the child, before he had reached her side, and a sharp frown contracted her face as she began to pour out the tea.

Eugénie drew her child towards her—away from the others as it seemed—and her sensitive lip quivered.

Sir John saw the instinctive gesture, and it pained him; but he was the last man in the world to be able to make up by soothing words for anything his mother might say or do. He could only ask a few commonplace questions about the voyage and the vessel, and he dared not allude to Lionel, nor the chances of the

campaign, lest the very mention of such matters might cause her increased distress.

Calm and composed as was her manner, he believed that she was feeling keenly the strangeness of her present position, and that it was anything but congenial to her. As she sat beside his mother, sipping her tea, and talking with the quiet natural dignity of manner well befitting a Durley, he could not keep his eyes off her, and he thought to himself that he had seldom seen a more lovely picture than she presented then.

She was robed in a long, clinging dress of pale, soft grey, which showed to advantage the slight, tall, graceful figure. Her face was pale and sad, but faultlessly beautiful in form and colouring, and there seemed to him something unspeakably pathetic in the glance of her dark grey eyes. She had taken off her hat, for it was hot and sultry beneath the trees, and a gleam of sunlight shone upon her hair, turning it to burnished gold. She looked very young, very fair, very lonely, and Sir John's tender heart ached for her. It was so very plain that she felt herself a stranger and an alien, in the home, which ought to have been her natural place of refuge.

Lady Durley was not communicative. She spoke in set phrases and at somewhat long intervals. To do her justice, she would have been more cordial if she could, she felt a certain sense of shame at so comporting herself towards the daughter-in-law whom she had promised to welcome. But with Lady Durley any kind of acting was all but impossible. She had always felt that her name and station entitled her to a certain emancipation from the petty diplomacy and insincerity which makes an important feature in modern society.

She made few friends, for her power of loving was very limited ; and she never cultivated the acquaintance of those for whom she had no special liking. When she met such people, she treated them with a stiff and stately courtesy ; but she never unbent or became genial, and it almost seemed as if the power to do so was lost.

If Eugénie was chilled by her reception, she would not let it appear. For awhile she confined herself to answering the perfunctory questions addressed to her by her mother-in-law ; and from time to time she lifted her eyes with that look, half-imploring half-defiant, which had struck Sir John in the first moment of meeting.

Very gradually, as it seemed to this silent watcher, her manner changed.

When she appeared to have satisfied herself that this was all the welcome she and her child were going to receive from the kindred who had claimed their right to befriend her, then an imperceptible change began to pass over her, the pensive sadness gradually gave place to an expression of greater animation, a faint rose tint stole into her face, and her eyes began slowly to shine, like those of some beautiful wild animal in a cage.

Sir John looked on in silent wonder, conscious of the change, yet unable to define it. Lady Durley seemed quite unaware of it. She hardly looked at her guest ; and it seemed as if she had already exhausted all topics of conversation.

But in proportion as the elder woman grew silent, so the younger one grew conversational.

Eugénie leaned negligently back in her chair, and looked over the sunlit landscape.

"What a lovely view!" she said, with a certain languid indifference rather at variance with the words she used. "I do not think I have ever seen anything so exquisite in all my life. How proud you must be of it!"

"I think we are," answered Sir John smiling. "I am afraid we Durleys are rather given to be proud of our old place. I dare say Lionel has told you a good deal about it."

"No indeed," answered Eugénie carelessly. "I do not think he ever mentioned it."

"No doubt the subject did not interest you," remarked Lady Durley coldly.

"Well," answered Eugénie reflectively, "descriptions of unknown places are not very interesting usually—don't you think so? One never gets the least idea of the reality."

Lady Durley made no reply; but it galled her to think that Lionel and his wife had never spoken of Linley Castle.

At this moment little Gascoigne broke into a cry of "Woss, Woss," and bounded suddenly forward to meet the hound, who, forgotten in the tumult of arrival, had been wandering dismally about in search of his friends.

"What dog is that?" asked Lady Durley, who had no love for animals.

"Mine," answered Eugénie, looking at Sir John with a touch of the old appeal. "Lionel assured me I might bring him—he is our best friend, Gascoigne's and mine."

"To be sure," answered Sir John readily. "What a fine fellow!"

"I am not fond of dogs about the garden," said

Lady Durley coldly. "But I suppose he can have a kennel in the yard."

Eugénie's cheek flushed a sudden crimson.

"If you will allow me, Lady Durley, I should prefer him indoors. He is perfectly trained and perfectly gentle. He has always been with me from a puppy. He is Gascoigne's only playfellow and staunchest protector, I cannot spare him for a yard dog—he would pine away and die. He shall never be in your way, but I must have him with me. He has slept at my bed's foot for the last five years."

Lady Durley looked both displeased and scandalised by this outburst.

"A dog of that size in the house!" she was beginning; but Sir John had begun to speak, and his calm resolute tones settled the question.

"You shall do exactly as you wish, Eugénie. You have your own suite of rooms, and your dog is welcome to share them if you desire it. I have no doubt you would like to see your own quarters, and the child will want putting to bed. I will summon the nurse my mother has engaged for him. I hope you will find her kind and capable. We dine at eight o'clock, and I hope you will not be too tired to join us at that hour."

Whilst he spoke, he led Eugénie quietly towards the house, the child and the dog following, and when he had made sure that the nurse and housekeeper were in attendance, ready to do the honours of the rooms for the benefit of their new occupants, he slowly returned to his mother, who was seated where he had left her on the terrace.

He made no remark on what had passed, save a rather weary sigh, and the exclamation,

"Poor child!"

"I do not see how, nor why, she merits compassion," said Lady Durley.

"She is very young to be so much alone in the world."

"At least she does not want for assurance. I have no pity for the bold self-contained beauties who so take the fancy of men. They generally manage to take very good care of themselves, I notice, and to win a great deal more pity than they deserve."

"Are you not rather hard on her, mother?"

"I do not think so. I think my judgment is more likely to be trustworthy than yours, upon such a point. I dare say she is even now triumphing over the small victory she has already obtained over me."

Sir John did not observe the bitterness of the tone; he murmured softly to himself,

"And I dare say she is crying her lovely eyes out, at the coldness of her reception to her new home."





CHAPTER IV.

EUGÉNIE.

SIR JOHN'S surmise, if not absolutely true to the letter, was not far wrong in the spirit.

Eugénie followed her guides silently up the beautiful old staircase, and along a richly carpeted corridor, hung with ancestral portraits, till they reached a suite of handsome, comfortable rooms in the west wing of the great house, which had been set apart for the use of Mrs. Lionel Durley and her little boy.

There was a day and night nursery, and a room for a maid beyond; a very luxurious bed-room and dressing-room for Eugénie and a beautiful boudoir with a great oriel window, which overlooked a lovely stretch of country, and was in all respects quite an ideal apartment with its exquisite appointments and tasteful harmony of colour.

The housekeeper displayed this suite of rooms with a proper pride, and Eugénie quietly admired everything and thanked her. Gascoigne had made a rush at the bread-and-milk which was steaming on the nursery table. His attendant was waiting upon him, and the housekeeper took the opportunity to remark,

"The nurse Elton, ma'am, is an excellent lady's

maid. She has been engaged to attend upon you and the young gentleman. I hope you will find her satisfactory."

"I have no doubt of it, thank you," answered Eugénie. She felt like one in a dream, and moved and spoke mechanically. She was relieved when the housekeeper left her, still more relieved after she had dismissed Elton, saying she would put the child to bed herself that night, indeed it was only when she found herself alone with the little boy and his big playfellow, that she felt able to think connectedly of what had befallen her.

Gascoigne was trotting about these strange, new rooms, which were all connected by doors of communication, excited and delighted by his new and spacious surroundings. Ross followed at his heels, and was the recipient of all his baby confidences; and Eugénie sat with clasped hands by the open window, in a desolation of spirit greater than anything she had as yet experienced.

And this was all, was it, all the love and all the welcome she was to receive from these relatives, who had offered her a home during her husband's absence? A home! A bitter smile played over her face at the idle mockery of the word. Home! Did food and shelter and sumptuous lodging make a home? Never until now had she felt so desolate, so forsaken, so homeless. Eugénie's was a nature peculiarly dependent on love. Love was to her a necessary part of existence. Life without it seemed to her something too sad and terrible to contemplate.

From her earliest childhood her father had given to her that caressing, protecting love which she so

deeply and unconsciously craved; and before he was taken away from her, she had won for herself a love as deep and true, in the heart of her young lover, who became at once her husband.

Lionel Durley, old beyond his years from the peculiarity of his bringing up, had been to her husband and father in one, and so long as she had his strong arm to lean upon, his tender love to shield her from every trial, she had never known, never dreamed what it could be like to live without this sense of protecting love and care.

And now? Now she felt like some tender, clinging creeper that has been rudely torn from its support, and has to battle alone with the pitiless elements, that must inevitably dash it to the ground and batter out its feeble, helpless life.

Oh, for one tone of her husband's voice, just one word of loving help and encouragement! Oh for one pressure of his strong arm, one tender kiss, one brief moment to nestle upon his shoulder, and pour out all her love and grief into his sympathetic ear! Oh how could she live without him, with this hungry, aching heart? Would it be *possible* to exist for long weary weeks and months without one kiss, one word, one look?

Eugénie wrung her hands together in the extremity of distress; but no tears came to relieve her. Her grief lay too deep to be lightened thus.

"How can I bear it? How can I bear it?" she murmured to herself. "Oh Lionel, my Lionel! how can I live without you among these cold, cruel strangers, who look upon me as an alien, and grudge me the name I bear—your name, my darling, to which I have as

good a right as they. What shall I do? How can I bear it? If you had known, you would never have sent me here."

Very mournful thoughts were filling Eugénie's heart—thoughts almost too sad to be bitter, although the element of bitterness was not wanting. She was too young to read in Sir John's diffident stiffness, the warmth and sympathy beneath, too young and inexperienced to comprehend, in any way, Lady Durley's complex altitude of mind, or to appreciate the value of the sacrifice already made, and see in it a promise for the future.

Eugénie was but two-and-twenty, and her experiences of life had been ill calculated to fit her for those which lay before her. Her wifehood and motherhood, whilst greatly deepening her powers of loving and suffering, had not given her that widened comprehension of humanity which they sometimes seem to bestow, but had rather centred her thoughts in her husband and child, and her own relations towards them. No higher and holier love had as yet purified what was selfish and earthly from this overwhelming human affection;—an affection pure in its outcome, yet only too ready to become charged with dross, which must in time, if not purged away, tarnish the brilliance of the true gold.

As yet earthly love was as yet the only one which had root in Eugénie's heart. God was but a name to her—a name held in all reverence and awe, but still a name, not a living reality. Prayer was but a form with her—a beautiful and soothing form, but still a form, not the pouring out of her own spirit. She recognised in Christ the Redeemer; she believed in

the sanctifying power of the Spirit ; yet there was no deep love in her heart for Jesus as the Saviour, who was slain to redeem her, no consciousness of His unchanging, yearning love for her ; nor had she ever sought in prayer for the guidance of the Spirit of God in her daily walk in life.

Had Eugénie possessed this higher love, had she had a Friend in Christ, a Father in God, much of this desolation of soul might have been spared her. But as it was, she seemed to stand quite alone, torn from all her old surroundings, and from the husband she so deeply loved, and thrown amongst cold-hearted strangers, who regarded her with feelings of disapprobation and disapproval, if not with actual dislike.

The young wife's mind was in a strange tumult of varied feeling.

" They will never, never love me—they do not even love Lionel. They do not speak of him, do not care to hear of him—he, who is so far away, who will so soon be exposed to danger, whom they may never see again ! "

Eugénie bit her lip, and the tears started to her eyes, but were kept resolutely back.

" Well if they are cold and hard, I will not crave their love. I will be the same. They shall not say I fawned upon them to gain their favour. If they are proud, so will I be—for Lionel's sake. I could forgive slights to myself ; but not to him—not to him.

" Why did they ask us here, if they mean to treat me so ? I did not want to come ; but they would have it. For the child's sake I suppose—because he is heir to all these lands ; and they will try to alienate him from me next, and make him despise the

name of Gascoigne as they despise it. But I will not have it—they shall not touch him! I have only my child left me. They shall not take him from me too—I will die first! Oh, my boy, my boy!”

With the fierce instinct of a mother's jealousy, she caught up her child and clasped him closely in her arms. The little fellow was tired with all his new experiences, and nestled contentedly in her arms, and the soft touch of his baby cheek was as balm to her wounded spirit.

Gradually the angry determination to hold herself proudly aloof, softened into a wistful desire to do and to be all that Lionel would wish her, under these trying circumstances. She no longer resolved to hate her husband's kindred, but began to wish that she could more truly please them.

New thoughts struggled through her mind, as she gently undressed the drowsy child and laid him in her own bed; and when she folded his hands in hers, and repeated the form of words his father had of late taught him to use, “Bless grandmother and Uncle John, and make me a very good boy to them,” she felt as if it was she, and not the child, who most needed to pray that prayer.

Gascoigne was asleep almost before he had finished his brief petition, and Eugénie, after pressing many soft kisses upon his innocent face, went and looked out upon the darkening landscape, with a somewhat softened sense of sorrow.

“Oh Lionel, Lionel! If you were only here! If I only had someone to lean upon—someone to help me, to tell me how to do right. I want to be good. I want to heal the breach, not to widen it; but there is

no one to help me, no one to befriend me I am so utterly alone—so desolate ! ”

A sudden doubt struck Eugénie in this more softened mood ; ought she to be so utterly alone, so desolate, even though she had been parted from her husband ? Some words he had spoken in their last sad interview, now returned to her mind (she had hardly heeded them then), and they struck her with a strange sense of novelty and force.

“ You will not be alone, my darling. We are never deserted, never left comfortless. Our Father never tries us beyond our strength ; and there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

Eugénie had always had a feeling that religion had been much more of a reality to her husband than to herself. He had seldom spoken on the subject. Like many young men, he was reserved in the expression of his feelings ; and he always took it for granted that his gentle, loving young wife shared his devotional instincts, and his unspoken, deepest thoughts. Day by day they had knelt side by side in prayer ; but Eugénie had often felt, by some nameless instinct, that whilst her prayers were but a form of words said by rote, and not always with an attentive mind, his were earnest petitions spoken from the heart. She shared his reserve in speaking on the subject, and they seldom discussed their own feelings or Bible promises ; yet she had always felt convinced that what to her were only forms and words, to him were living realities, and she had never felt more certain of this, than when she now realised the meaning of some of his last words to her.

He had believed that thoughts of God and of His

love would really lighten the burden of his wife's sorrow. He had thought that in religion she would find a solace which would be an unfailing source of comfort to her in her loneliness.

Eugénie smiled sadly to herself, and shook her head. She knew only too well that such was not the case, nor did she even feel that such a state of feeling would be possible. It seemed to her that there was no room in her heart for a new love; her husband and her child occupied it to the exclusion of all else. She even felt a sort of jealous pain at the idea of consolation during her husband's absence, or at sharing her love with any other idol, human or divine. With the tenacity of purpose, not unfrequently associated in the young with great apparent gentleness, Eugénie determined that no love should usurp in her heart that pre-eminent place held by her husband.

But even whilst making this decision, a great desire sprang up in her mind to please that husband, and to act rightly towards all around her; and in that desire, she dressed herself for dinner with scrupulous care, and made her entry into the drawing-room in excellent time.

"When I come back, and visit my dear old home," Lionel had said to her one day, "I shall expect to find you established quite as the daughter of the house."

These words were ringing in her head as she made her entrance into the drawing-room. She knew she had not produced a favourable impression upon her first arrival. Could she not do better now? Eugénie, young, beautiful and gracious, was accustomed to carry all before her. Surely she could do so here, where she really wished to please.

So she went and sat beside Lady Durley and tried to talk freely and naturally to her, tried to throw off the paralysing sense of strangeness which her new surroundings, and her mother-in-law's stiffness, occasioned her. Perhaps her talk was not quite natural, her laugh a little forced; but she was doing her best, as she thought, poor child, to carry out her husband's wishes, and was putting great stress upon herself in so doing. She little knew that Lady Durley was inwardly resenting this flow of comment and question, and was accusing her son's wife of "patronising her in her own house."

Things did not go much better at dinner. With the same feverish wish to please, not to appear unhappy, and to show all due respect to her hosts, Eugénie tried her utmost to make talk, and avoid the long pauses which tried her composure sadly, for she could not bear to think, and talking was her only resource. But common subjects of interest were not easy to find. Eugénie had lived all her life in military circles, of which her relatives knew nothing, and upon which Lady Durley looked with a certain sense of horror; and the girl's very familiarity with so much to which she was an utter stranger, seemed to her of necessity a wrong. Her answers were cold, her face severe; and on one or two occasions she turned the conversation so pointedly, that Eugénie felt rebuked without knowing in what she had offended.

Sir John hardly opened his lips; and she thought him, in her heart, worse than his mother, and in the lamp-light his face looked more hollow and more severe than ever. The fact was that Sir John, who was never able to bear excitement or anxiety without

feeling it acutely afterwards, was in very great pain, and hardly able to sit at table at all. He had made a great effort to be present at dinner, that his sister-in-law should not be left entirely to his mother's tender mercies; but now that he was there, he could do nothing to relieve their guest from the burden of conversation, and he felt that his silence would be misunderstood and misconstrued.

Lady Durley was quite aware of the true state of the case, and anxiety for her son made her answers more short and more tart than they would otherwise have been. By the conclusion of the meal poor Eugénie felt utterly miserable and hopeless. She excused herself, on the plea of fatigue, from remaining with Lady Durley in the drawing-room, and with a weary, aching heart she went up to her own room.

"They will never like me—they are set against me. I can see it only too well already. Oh, why are they so hard and cold? Why need they be so cruel? O Lionel, my darling, you would never have sent me, had you known. Shall I write—telegraph—and beg to be released? No, no! It would distress him. I will bear it patiently for his sake—they say troubles are sent to do us good, though I cannot see how. I will try to be good, I will try to be patient; but I will make no more advances. I cannot bear this sort of thing. I will live with my boy away from them—live with him, and for him till Lionel comes back. Oh my little Gascoigne, what should I do without you!"



CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER HOME.

THE great event has actually happened," remarked young Dr. Beauchamp, entering his brother's drawing-room two evenings later, "Mrs. Lionel Durley is an inmate of the Castle."

This news created a little stir of surprise and interest in a small group gathered about the open window, and Lucile Beauchamp, the speaker's sister-in-law, looked up quickly and asked,

"Have you seen her, Willoughby?"

"Yes, I saw her in the distance; but not to speak to. You know," added Willoughby with a slight smile, "that my visits at Linley Castle are strictly professional. The family doctor is not made the family friend."

Lucile's smile had in it something of disdain.

"Poor Lady Durley cannot forgive Frank for having bought Fontbury Park from the traditional owners, whose pedigree rivalled that of the Durleys."

Colonel Francis Beauchamp laid down his paper with a laugh. His kindly, open face expressed nothing but honest amusement.

"You see, my dear," he said, "you make but a poor substitute for that ancient dame, Lady Eleanora, of whom we bought the place. It is natural that she should miss the aristocratic flavour which must hang about 'the daughter of a hundred earls,' as the poet aptly expresses it."

Lucile shrugged her shoulders.

"Lady Durley is a very disagreeable woman. I am sure we none of us desire any closer acquaintanceship with her."

"Sour grapes, my love," began her husband teasingly, when Willoughby Beauchamp broke in with his word of farther explanation:

"I believe the real cause of offence lies in the fact that Frank is my brother. You know she was not at all willing that I should attend Sir John when old Dr. Heatherleigh resigned his share of the practice; and I don't think she quite forgave me for being the one doctor who hit upon a remedy which does relieve him more than anything yet tried. However, such being the case, I was permitted to continue my attendance; but was never admitted, save in my professional capacity. I am convinced that Lady Durley looked upon me as a pushing young man, who required keeping in his place, and I believe she hinted the same to others, who follow her lead, looking on her as the *grande dame* of the neighbourhood. When, however, old Frank settled at Fontbury Park matters changed a little, and the insignificant doctor became at once a different person. Lady Durley feels as if her example had been set at naught, and resents it accordingly. Her own veto is like the law of the Medes and Persians which nothing can change."

“Poor Sir John, what a life she must lead him!” remarked Lucile. “I wonder he allows himself to be so over-ridden. He is very nice, I always do think, though he says so little.”

“Poor fellow, he has one of the simplest, most love-able natures I know, although he is too reserved to be easily known. Lady Durley does appreciate him, however. Let us do her justice—she has been a devoted mother to him.”

“Yes; but what about Mrs. Lionel Durley? I want to know what she is like. When did she come? and how do she and Lady Durley get on?”

“That I cannot say; but from Sir John’s anxious, careworn looks and increase of pain, I am inclined to fancy that there is some mental strain upon him. He looks worse than he has done for some months, and I cannot help thinking that he is worried about his sister-in-law. He asked me to look at a horse he had bought for her to drive, and to try its paces and temper, all of which seemed to me perfectly satisfactory. He happened to name the price, which I thought a long one, and said so; and he answered, with a sort of sigh, that he was too anxious for his sister-in-law to have some means of enjoyment to care much for anything else. He was afraid it was a very dismal house for a young thing to come to—himself such an invalid, and his mother too old to be a companion for her. He threw out a hint, which I think was meant for you, Lucile, that he should feel very grateful to any friends about who would show themselves neighbourly towards her. She has been used to a lively, military society, and is likely to feel this rural solitude very dismal. She feels the separation

from her husband very much ; and affairs with Afghanistan begin to look ugly.'

Lucile looked up with a more sympathetic face.

"Poor girl, I should like to be kind to her ; but Lady Durley is rather an ogress. I will call, however, and see what I can accomplish."

"Do," advised her husband, whose recent connection with the army gave him a special interest in a soldier's wife. "She is quite young, is she not ? I remember hearing that young Durley married under age, a girl some years younger than himself—a romantic affair altogether."

"I do not know about that," answered Willoughby ; "but I am sure she is quite young, and wonderfully beautiful. I saw her from the window, playing in the garden with her little boy and a great deer-hound. It was the prettiest picture I have seen for a long time ; and Sir John evidently thought the same. I believe he is very fond of her and the boy already, although no doubt his reserve makes him appear cold and indifferent."

"I could ask her child to come and play sometimes with ours," remarked Lucile reflectively, "that at least would make a connecting link. Poor little chap, he must be very dull without any playmates. Yes, I will try to work that."

"Thank you," answered Willoughby, who seemed to take a personal interest in Mrs. Lionel Durley ; and then looking round, he added,

"Where is Constance ?"

"She was here just now—just before you came in. I suppose she must be in the garden."

Willoughby stepped out of the open window, into

the stillness of the night, where twilight and moonlight were still struggling together, in a misty atmosphere peculiarly warm and sweet; and a few roses just bursting into bloom charged the air with their dewy fragrance.

The gardens of Fontbury Park were extensive and exquisitely kept. On such a night as this, they seemed to tempt anyone and everyone to come out and enjoy their sweet freshness. In a beautiful little avenue of stately lime trees, not yet so thick in foliage as to exclude the dancing moonbeams, Willoughby found the object of his search.

"Ah Willoughby," said a clear, girlish voice, "that is your step, I know it is. We thought you would look in this evening. Have you been in to see them?"

"Yes, and now I have come out to see you."

Constance looked up, and smiled in the darkness.

"I suppose you have something for me to do?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so too. Mrs. Woodward's eldest boy has broken his leg; and the man two doors off is down with typhoid. I want them both to have soup regularly, if Lucile will put them on the list—I mean, of course, beef tea for the typhoid. He will do well if he gets enough nourishment of the right sort. Are the convalescents doing well?"

"Yes, all but little Mary. I want you to see her again to-morrow. I am afraid there is another abscess forming."

"Only too probable, poor child. I will look in to-morrow. You are as good as an assistant, Constance. Will you be alarmed if I ask your interest on behalf of a different class of persons?"

"What do you mean?" asked Constance. "Do you mean one of your wealthy patients?"

"I do not mean a patient at all. I am speaking of no less a person than Mrs. Lionel Durley, who is at present quite a stranger to me."

Constance's eyes opened wide with surprised inquiry. Her companion proceeded to tell her the few details he had related to his brother and Lucile.

"I daresay she does feel lonely at first," said Constance sympathetically; "but what can I do, Willoughby? Lucile would be much more the right person to befriend her."

Willoughby smiled thoughtfully.

"I have tried to enlist Lucile's interest on her behalf, as I am convinced Sir John wished me to do; but at the same time, Constance, I have more confidence in your powers of sympathy than in Lucile's. You know my eyes see farther than many people's; and as I watched Mrs. Lionel Durley's face this morning, I thought I had never seen one so utterly sad, heart-sick, and desolate in its expression. It has haunted me ever since. Such a look as that no face *ought* to wear. There must be some terrible want, or terrible sorrow, underneath. I want you to find out what it is, Constance."

The girl smiled at his earnestness; but she was well used to his ready interest in all who were sick or sad, and his inborn wish to find a cure for every malady either of body or mind. She had been his friend and confidante in many similar cases, and so she answered readily,

"Of course I should like to do whatever I could;

but you know, Willoughby, those kind of patients are not the easiest to deal with."

"I know," he answered gravely. "I am quite conscious of it; and at Linley Castle matters are more difficult to accomplish than at any other place. But you know Sir John has made a friend of me to a certain extent—far more so than his mother knows—and I feel certain that some words, dropped by him to-day, were a sort of appeal to me and mine. After all, you are very near neighbours; and a married woman is not like a mere girl. Things may smooth themselves out for you."

"Perhaps they will," answered Constance. "I hope so." And then they walked on slowly to the end of the avenue; where Willoughby turned and said good-night. He had some few patients still to visit, and could not longer protract his visit.

Constance Seymour paced the avenue several times after he had left her, thinking over what had passed. She was a cousin of Lucile's, and being orphaned in her childhood, had been brought up by her uncle, and was like a sister to Lucile.

Francis and Willoughby Beauchamp had been their playfellows from childhood. Francis had been in the army for many years, and had only lately, by his father's death, come into a fortune which enabled him to leave his profession and settle down as a country gentleman. He and his brother Willoughby had been always much attached, and it was partly his desire to be near together that had induced Colonel Beauchamp to purchase Fontbury Park, at which place his brother held a practice. The purchase had turned out satisfactory in every way, and now the Beau-

champs had been settled for three years in their new home. Constance Seymour, on the death of Lucile's father, had come to live with Lucile once again, and help her to manage her four little children; and it seemed almost like a revival of old times, the constant intercourse between the two Beauchamp brothers and Constance and her cousin.

From childhood Constance and Willoughby had been faithful friends and companions. Both had early taken somewhat serious views of life and its responsibilities. Both had held the belief that their powers had been given them to use, not merely for selfish ends, but for the good of their fellow-men.

It had been thought by many that Willoughby would decide upon entering the church, when the time came for him to choose his career; but instead of doing so, he elected the medical profession, into which he threw his whole energies, and took his degree at an unusually early age. His practice was now a fair and increasing one, though not very lucrative, owing to his odd fancy for poor patients who could not pay, and whom he had often to feed as well as to doctor. But if ever a man was beloved by his patients that man was Dr. Willoughby Beauchamp, and if ever man did noble and earnest work for his fellows, without thinking of reward, or of aught save an intense wish to do some work for God in the world, that man was the young doctor at Fontbury.

Constance Seymour was his untiring friend and assistant in all his plans and all his labours; and thus it was that it came about that she was asked to interest herself in Eugénie Durley, whose desolate look had made a deep impression upon Willoughby's ob-

servant mind. It had seemed to him that something must be very wrong within, as well as without, before a young mother, with her child in her arms, could look as she had done.

When Constance went indoors, she was greeted by the question,

"Will you come with me to call upon Mrs. Durley some day this week? Willoughby is anxious for us to show her some kindness; and I am sure she will be thankful to anyone who will rescue her from the inspiriting society of Lady Durley! You will come, will you not, Constance?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Has Willoughby been talking to you?"

"Yes."

"Ah then, you will know all that we do. We will certainly do what we can for the poor child. I feel quite fond of her already."





CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR'S VISIT.

EUGÉNIE'S desolate feeling of loneliness in her new home, had not been lightened by the lapse of time.

There could be no doubt on the matter—Lady Durley did not like her. She was not unkind, she gave no just cause for complaint; and yet she made the young girl's life a burden to her.

Of Sir John she saw but little during the first days, as he was very unwell, and remained shut up for the most part in his own rooms. Eugénie hardly even missed him, for she had no idea that he regarded her with any more favour than did his mother, and his drawn, hollow face always haunted her after she had seen him, with a sensation akin to pain. People so old, in appearance or reality, as her brother and mother-in-law seemed to Eugénie to belong to a different world from herself. She could hardly believe that they could have any feelings in common. The child might have made a connecting link between them; but so far his mother had guarded him jealously from any but the barest notice from his grandmother and uncle.

A morbid fear lest they should try to win him away from her, tormented her whenever the boy was out of her sight. She craved, with all the intensity of her nature, for a love which a little child of but four years old could hardly yield her; and when he struggled down from her passionate embrace, or declined, with childish caprice, to give her the kisses she was always demanding—for his were now the only caresses she ever received—she would fancy, with a keen pang at heart, that the work of alienation had already begun, and that her child was drifting away from her. In fact, Eugénie was in danger, at this time, of falling into a very morbid and unhealthy state of mind.

She was not without excuse perhaps. She was misunderstood by her mother-in-law, and she certainly did receive comment and criticism which were hardly just, and which embittered her heart against her new relatives, whom she always associated together in her own mind. Take, for example, a conversation which took place upon the third day after her arrival, when Lady Durley came upon mother and child, playing together in the garden early in the day.

The boy had not seen her that morning, and made no move towards her, for Lady Durley was no favourite of his, but his mother said,

“Go and say ‘Good morning’ to grandmother, Gascoigne,” and after a slight demur, she was obeyed.

“He ought not to need prompting in matters of common politeness,” remarked Lady Durley coldly.

“He is only four,” returned Eugénie almost indignantly, “you cannot expect everything from a baby.”

“He is very intelligent for his age—quite enough

so to understand what is expected even of a little child."

The tribute to Gascoigne's powers softened the rebuke: Eugénie smiled and caressed the boy's head.

"I hope you will not spoil him," remarked the grandmother.

"Oh no!" answered Eugénie lightly; "he is always good with me."

Lady Durley had seated herself beside the pair. She spoke again, by-and-by, in her coldest way. When really feeling softened, she often assumed the air of greatest severity. Gascoigne's childish beauty and the likeness to the Durleys, which the bold little face wore, had struck her with great force that day; and yet there was almost as much pain as pleasure in the sight.

"You should have called him John," she said, as she looked earnestly at the boy, who was chasing butterflies over the lawn, with shouts of baby joy and triumph.

Eugénie made no answer.

"The eldest son of the house is always called John," pursued Lady Durley with some severity, "I am surprised Lionel had not more proper feeling."

Eugénie flushed up hotly.

"It was not Lionel's doing," she answered quickly. "It was mine."

"Lionel wished to call him John, then?"

"Yes—at least he said—he told me what you said just now."

"And you objected?"

Eugénie's face was still hotly flushed; but she gave her answer without flinching.

"Yes, I objected."

"Ah!" said Lady Durley significantly. "I might have known how it was."

Eugénie turned her head away, to hide the tears of wounded pride that stood in her eyes. How well she remembered the conversation which had passed upon the subject between her and her husband.

"No, Lionel, not that!" she had pleaded, when he had told her of the family tradition. "It would look as though we reckoned on your brother's never marrying—on our boy's being his heir. It does not seem right to me to do so. Your brother is only forty; he may get better and marry, and have children of his own. I could not bear to look as though we expected ours to come into the title and estate. Do not let us give him the family name. I should not like it."

Lionel had given way to this argument, and the child had received his mother's maiden name—a name dear to both his parents; but Eugénie could not now explain to this unsympathetic listener her reason for objecting to the name of John; and the "Gascoigne" seemed to stick in the throat of Lady Durley, who looked upon the appellation as little short of an insult to the family.

With so much sore feeling on both sides, wounded pride and sense of injustice and misapprehension, it was small wonder that Eugénie grew ever more and more desolate, and sometimes found it hard to bear up at all against loneliness and despair.

And to make matters worse, as it seemed at first, at the end of a week little Gascoigne threatened to fall ill.

He had been out rather late one evening with his mother, and had been caught in a thunder shower some

way from home. The boy's clothes had got wet, and he had been frightened by the storm; and had not slept well all the night following.

He woke in the morning heavy and feverish, and Eugénie, with the terror of inexperience, made up her mind that he was dangerously ill, and might even be taken away from her.

For the first time since her arrival she was thankful to be surrounded by the comforts of Linley Castle, and by people older and wiser than herself; and as soon as she could venture to do so, she despatched a messenger to entreat Lady Durley to come to her.

The summons was obeyed with an alacrity that surprised Eugénie. Lady Durley came in, wrapped in her flowing morning-gown, a look of anxiety stamped upon her face. For once the kiss exchanged between the two women had something of warmth in it.

"My boy is so ill," said Eugénie tremulously.

Lady Durley was passing on to the nurseries, but she checked her.

"He is here. He sleeps with me," she explained.

The grandmother made no comment then, but turned to the child and bent over him.

Gascoigne opened his heavy eyes and looked at her with an appealing expression.

"Poor Chap very poorly," he said gravely. "Mamsey can't make Chap better. Grandy try."

He held out his arms to her for the first time in his life—seeing for the first time a real tenderness in the wrinkled face above him. Who can withstand the simple, spontaneous appeal for help made by a little child? Lady Durley could not. Her heart suddenly warmed towards the boy.

She was a strong woman still, and she was an experienced woman; and her son's health had kept her conversant, to a remarkable extent, with the requirements and the appearances of illness. She saw at once that the child was too hot, too much wrapped up, and quite overpowered by the feather bed, which was so soft and yielding as to half smother him.

She lifted him bodily out, wrapping his little dressing-gown well about him, and carried him to his own cool night nursery, where his clean crib stood invitingly in a dark corner.

The little fellow gave a great sigh of relief when laid in his own little white bed, and tucked up there by experienced hands, that knew exactly how the bed-clothes might most comfortably be arranged. His face, though still flushed and heavy, no longer looked piteous, and he smiled as he said,

"Chap better now. Chap likes Grandy."

Eugénie trembled lest the familiarity of the term, which was entirely self-made, should give offence; but Lady Durley only said kindly and quietly,

"Now do not talk any more, but try to go to sleep," and turning towards the mother, she asked,

"What does he call himself?"

"It was Lionel's name," answered Eugénie. "He used to call him 'old chap' and the child caught it up, Gascoigne being beyond his powers."

Lady Durley looked down steadily at the child, and said,

"There is not much amiss with him. He is a little feverish, I suspect he has taken cold. Keep him quiet, and do not let him talk or excite himself. I will give directions to Elton about his food and medicine."

Eugénie was somewhat reassured, yet still anxious.

"You will let him see a doctor?" she said nervously. "He is not very strong. I should not like—I mean—don't you think he should be prescribed for by a medical man?"

"I do not myself see any occasion for it," replied Lady Durley, not unkindly, yet as it seemed to the anxious young mother, very unsympathetically, "there is really no occasion for any uneasiness. The boy will do very well with ordinary care and attention."

Then she went away to her own room, and when the nurse came with the child's light breakfast, Eugénie found that she was expected to attend the family meal as usual; and when there, she saw, with mixed feelings of pain and resentment, that Gascoigne's health was not the only topic of interest in the minds of her relatives.

Sir John asked kindly after him; but did not seem at all disturbed at his illness, and Lady Durley made no allusion to it, save at the close of the meal, when she prepared a dose, which she recommended that the child should take at once.

Eugénie took up the potion and tried to administer it, but illness had made Gascoigne fretful and irritable; and he pushed her hand away and would not drink.

Eugénie was always somewhat deficient in commanding power; but gentle persuasions generally gained the mastery over the affectionate child, and led to the belief that her authority was greater than was perhaps actually the case. But in this instance, all blandishments failed, even grave commands were set at naught, and so excited and vehement did the child become,

that Eugénie in alarm sent again for Lady Durley, believing the boy delirious.

The grandmother, however, seemed to grasp the situation at once. Her firm, commanding tones reduced Gascoigne to prompt obedience. The draught was swallowed without a murmur, and to Eugénie's intense astonishment, and rather to her dismay, the little boy held fast to his grandmother's hand and said half piteously, half coaxingly,

"Grandy stay with Chap. Grandy makes him better than Mamsey."

Eugénie bit her lip. She thought the child must indeed be ill before his mind could be so changed towards her. Of a sick child's caprice she understood nothing.

"Do let him see a doctor!" she pleaded; and Lady Durley answered with a half smile,

"He shall, if you greatly wish it. I believe John expects Dr. Beauchamp to-day. I will leave orders for him to come and see the child."

It seemed a long, weary day to Eugénie. Lady Durley did not remain long with them, though she visited them from time to time. The heat was trying, the boy was irritable and fretful, and it seemed as if the doctor would never come.

Towards five o'clock his restlessness became so great, that Eugénie lifted him out of bed, and rocked him in her arms, as she sat at the open window, and the soothing motion of the swaying chair, and the warm breeze fanning his hot face, lulled him into a quiet sleep.

Suddenly the door opened quietly and firmly, and Eugénie, looking round, saw a tall, well-built man of

about thirty, with a peculiar and striking face, at once very keen and very friendly, whom she instinctively knew must be the doctor.

He motioned to her not to move, and came and stood over the child, scanning his unconscious face very critically, and feeling his pulse and his skin with practised touch. Gascoigne woke with a sudden frightened cry; but the tall man took him up so gently, and talked to him with such a fine command of baby language, that his fears were soothed, and he allowed himself to be put back into bed without a sound of remonstrance.

Then Willoughby turned to the mother, who stood by looking sadly pale and anxious, and smiled reassuringly.

"He will do very well," he said, "he has only taken a feverish cold, keep him quiet and keep him in bed and he will go on very well. Indeed you are making yourself needlessly anxious."

"He is all I have left," answered Eugénie tremulously, her attempt at a smile dying helplessly away. "I dare say I am very foolish; but he is my all."

The keen, dark eyes were fixed upon her with so friendly a gaze of comprehension and sympathy that she felt almost unnerved. She so needed help, and yet what help could a stranger give?

"Your all?" he questioned, still perusing the lines of her face with attention.

"All I have here," she answered with a pathetic cadence in her voice. "My husband is on his way to Afghanistan. Who knows," speaking with an effort at calmness, "if I shall ever see him again?"

"Mrs. Durley," said Willoughby, in his very gentle

yet very resolute way, "you ought not to speak so, or even to think so. God is very good. You must trust Him to guard your husband."

This was such a very unexpected rejoinder from a young man and a stranger, that it arrested Eugénie's instant attention, and yet it did not startle her, nor did it seem very strange or uncalled for.

"Ah!" she said, clasping her hands closely together, "God is so far away!"

"No," he answered in the same tone. "He is not far away; but you are hiding yourself from Him."

"I am not!" cried Eugénie, with a sort of passionate despair in her tone. "I have appealed to Him again and again; but He will not hear me. I am tired of being told of His love and His promises. Every book I open is full of them; but it is all empty sound—all vain words."

"Open one book more, Mrs. Durley," advised Willoughby, quietly, "the book of personal experience."

Eugénie looked at him, but half-comprehending his drift; and the next words that passed treated of ordinary topics.

"I think my sister missed seeing you when she called."

"Your sister?"

"Well, sister-in-law, to be more accurate; but Lucile always seems like my own sister. Did not Mrs. Beauchamp call upon you yesterday?"

"Yes; but I was out. I am sorry. I did not know you were her brother."

"I think," he said, looking at her with friendly comprehension, "that it would do you good to see a

few more faces. • You will find Lucile a very pleasant friend, I hope ; and she has some nice little children.”

Eugénie smiled with a shade less melancholy.

“Thank you,” she said looking up at him frankly, “I will come and see her when I can. I think I should like to know your sister.”





CHAPTER VII.

MAKING FRIENDS.

THE following day Gascoigne was better, and by mid-day even Eugénie's anxious eyes could see the change that had taken place. But she herself looked pale and tired, after her anxious day and wakeful night, and Sir John at luncheon time commented with brotherly solicitude upon her appearance.

"You have over-tired yourself with anxiety for the child, my dear," said Lady Durley more kindly than usual. "You had better take a drive this afternoon. The fresh air will do you good. I will look after the boy in your absence."

"Oh, thank you," answered Eugénie with somewhat nervous haste, "I should like to take a little drive—but—but Gascoigne will be quite happy with Ross and his nurse. Elton is very good to him, and the dog is his best playfellow." The jealous fear lest Lady Durley should win from her the heart of her child had sprung up anew in the mother's mind. She was almost ashamed of the fear, but it would not be laid to rest.

Lady Durley made no direct answer, and the sub-

ject dropped. Gascoigne was full of play and mischief when she went up to him later, and as he soon tired himself with his own fun, she had the satisfaction of seeing him fall asleep in his crib before she received notice that the carriage was waiting for her. Bidding the faithful hound watch over his little master till her return, Eugénie descended with a lightened heart, left a message for Lady Durley to the effect that the boy was asleep, and drove away with a sense of relief at escaping from the heavy atmosphere of Linley Castle.

The pretty pony-phæton and gentle-tempered horse which Sir John had taken so much pains to get for her, were a source of great pleasure to Eugénie. She was fond of driving, and the country around Fontbury was exceedingly lovely ; and her happiest hours, since her arrival in England, had been spent driving along the shady lanes, exploring them one by one, with Gascoigne full of merry prattle at her side, and the faithful Ross in close attendance. But to-day there was no Gascoigne to amuse her with his chatter, and her heart was unusually heavy, she hardly knew why.

It seemed as if the sun had lost a portion of its cheering power, as if the green lanes had grown less beautiful than they had been of late.

"It is dull driving alone," said Eugénie to herself. "I wonder if I should find Mrs. Beauchamp at home, if I were to call. Surely it was Thursday that Sir John said she was always at home, when I asked him about them last night."

With an increase of animation, Eugénie turned her horse's head in the direction of Fontbury Park, and

was soon entering the well-kept grounds, and admiring the sweep of richly-wooded land through which the drive passed before reaching the house.

Fontbury Park stood much lower than Linley Castle, and was quite near to the town; but so well shut in and protected was it by its own grounds, that it seemed even more remote and retired from the haunts of man than did the Castle itself.

Some little children were playing in a secluded shrubbery-walk. Eugénie heard their merry voices and caught a glimpse of them, as she passed. What a peaceful, happy home it seemed! Ah! if only she could have such an one!

Mrs. Beauchamp was at home, she heard, and she was taken into an exquisitely furnished drawing-room, where she was received with warm and graceful cordiality, by two young and pretty women, one of whom was Mrs. Beauchamp, and the other her cousin, Miss Seymour.

Lucile's heart went out at once to Eugénie. She was an ardent admirer of beauty, and certainly Mrs. Lionel Durley satisfied her highest ideal. Then she was, or had been, a soldier's wife, and knew some of the trials and vicissitudes incident to such a union; and Eugénie's pale face, with its expression of patient, wistful sadness, appealed to all the womanliness of her nature, and called forth the true sympathy of a generous soul.

"My dear child," she said with the sweet familiarity of a sudden impulse, "I have so wanted to see you, to tell you how I feel for you. I have gone through it myself. I know what it is. Nobody who has not known what such a separation is, can understand

what it means to us," and she kissed Eugénie on both cheeks, with the tears of feeling in her eyes.

This genuine bit of comprehensive sympathy did more to comfort Eugénie's sad heart, than anything that had happened to her since the terrible parting with her husband, which now seemed so long ago.

She returned Lucile's kiss warmly, and said in her quiet, musical tones,

"Ah, thank you, thank you! That does me good. Nobody else understands."

"Her voice is as lovely as her face," thought Lucile. "Poor child! how young she looks, and how sad!" Aloud she added,

"I have wanted to see you ever since you arrived, but was afraid you would hardly care about seeing strangers. I was so disappointed to miss you the other day. It is good of you to have come so soon. I am sure your dear little boy must be better—I need hardly ask."

"He is almost well this afternoon; but yesterday I was frightened about him. I feel so helpless when he ails anything. My husband used always to doctor him in Malta. He understood things so well."

"Willoughby is a first-rate man with children—though perhaps I should not praise my brother," said Lucille encouragingly, "but really he seems to have a sort of instinct where they are concerned. I never have a moment's anxiety about mine. It is a nursery tradition that 'Uncle Boy,' as they call him, can cure them all by merely looking at them. If your little boy is delicate or ailing, you may be confident that Willoughby will make a new man of him before long."

Eugénie looked greatly comforted. She was young

enough and impressionable enough, to be easily cast down, and easily raised up in spirit. Lucile's ten years' seniority and established position inspired her with unbounded confidence in her, whilst her ready sympathy and youthfulness of feeling interposed no bar to immediate confidence. Frankly unreserved and affectionate natures are generally very loveable, nearly always very attractive and refreshing. They do not always stand the test of trial. Sometimes they prove somewhat unstable, somewhat disappointing in the end; but there is a freshness and a sense of pleasure in their first contact which is very soothing and pleasant, especially when taken in contrast with coldness or want of comprehension in others.

So it was in Eugénie's case, when she came from the cool, constrained atmosphere of Linley Castle, into the sunshine of Lucile's presence. Everything seemed changed in a moment, even the air she breathed; and in listening to her new friend's easy talk of her husband, her children, and the affairs of the place, she felt more enlivened, more consoled, more taken out of herself, than she had done for many a long day.

But presently some other guests came in who claimed the attention of the hostess. Mrs. Beauchamp's reception days were generally popular in Fontbury, and Eugénie found herself amid quite a number of people, all of whom were strangers to herself. She shrank a little from the sight of strange faces, and from the looks of interest and admiration which were bent upon her. It was a relief when a gentle voice beside her said,

"Are you feeling the heat, Mrs. Durley? Would you not like to come into the garden?"

"Oh, thank you, yes I should," answered Eugénie gratefully. It was Constance Seymour who had spoken, and who now stood beside her. "I will say good-bye to Mrs. Beauchamp first, for I cannot be much longer away from my boy; but I should like to walk round the garden. It looks so pretty."

Five minutes later she and Constance were pacing a shady walk together, silent yet not constrained.

"How pretty it is here," said Eugénie at last, "prettier than at Linley."

"Is it? I have not been often to the Castle; but I always thought it so beautifully situated."

"Is it?" questioned Eugénie listlessly; and presently she added, "I suppose we never much admire a place unless we are happy there."

Constance gave her a look of inquiry, and asked gently,

"You have not been happy there yet?"

"No; and I never shall be," was the quiet answer.

"Do not say that," remonstrated the other, with less open, but quite as true sympathy as Lucile had evinced, "you will grow used to it in time. You will learn to be happy."

"No, never, never!" cried Eugénie with sudden vehemence. "You do not know nor understand—how can you?—I cannot be happy without my husband. Life is all one great blank. Sometimes I feel as if I could not *live*."

Constance's eyes expressed a great pity, and Eugénie proceeded with the rapidity of an over-burdened heart, only now finding relief in words.

"Happy! Oh, if you could only see into my heart. It is all one empty blank. Life has lost all its colour,

all its beauty. Everything seems changed and dead. And it used to be so different! I was so happy once! When I had Lionel, just to be with him was enough. It was life and it was happiness just to walk with him, to talk to him, to feel that he was near. I did not know in those days all that he was to me. I did not stop to think what it was that made my happiness; but now I know—now when he is far away, and life looks one long, arid waste, one awful blank till he comes back to me. And then that horrible, frightful uncertainty. Ah, what pain there is in love! Sometimes it seems as if the pain were more than the joy—” and Eugénie paused in uncontrollable agitation.

Constance said nothing, though her heart was full of tender pity. Words did not come as readily to her as they did to Lucile; but the silence of sympathy sometimes speaks more eloquently than words, and Constance’s eyes told Eugénie that her outburst had not been poured into uncomprehending ears. She conquered her emotion, and said with a very sweet, sad smile,

“Thank you, thank you. I cannot tell what made me break down so. I think it must have been seeing your cousin’s happy home—mine was once so happy. But I did not mean to be so unpleasant. Only there are so many things I want to know, and I seem to have no friends left. You look so calm, and so content, and so strong. Do help me! Do tell me, are you always happy?”

“I am happy—yes,” answered Constance with a sweet gravity, wonderfully different from Eugénie’s restless, questioning eagerness. “I have not known

such ties as you speak of. I have been an orphan from my childhood: and it is to Lucile's generous goodness that I owe my present home. In some senses I am very much alone in the world; but yet I am happy."

"Tell me about yourself—tell me what you do," cried Eugénie eagerly, "I am alone in the world now, and I am miserable. I can understand why your cousin is happy; she has her husband, her children. But you have nothing. You must make your own happiness. Tell me what you do. I should like to do the same if I could."

Constance smiled tenderly and almost sadly. She was four years older than this young wife and mother, who had drunk so deeply the draught of human joy, and had so evidently missed realising the higher and better love, which no outward changes can change or weaken. Four years older only, and yet at that moment she felt as if speaking to a little child; it seemed so strange and pitiful for this beautiful woman, with everything showered upon her which constitutes this world's good, to be seeking so blindly after a happiness which this world's gifts can never bestow, thinking with a childish simplicity, that her own works, her own deeds could purchase the boon she craved.

"What is it you do?" was the eager question. "How do you spend your time? Tell me, that I may do the same."

It was a pitiful question; and Constance longed to open her heart, and speak to her of a happiness which is not to be won by any deed of our own. But this did not seem the time nor the place to open such

a discussion. Eugénie was almost a stranger, and Constance was reserved in the expression of her deeper feelings; so just now she merely gave a simple answer to the simple question.

"I am very busy all day long. I have many occupations. I teach Lucile's two little girls most of what they learn, and I do a good deal in the garden, for I love flowers. Then my cousin Willoughby—the doctor, you know—finds me a great deal of work in visiting his convalescent patients. He is so busy, you know, that it is difficult for him to keep convalescents on his list, and yet the poor things like to feel that somebody looks after them still. Lucile always has a great deal of 'kitchen physic' made, and I take it round to the sick or recovering as Willoughby directs. It occupies a great deal of my time; but it is very interesting work and is a great help to him."

"Ah, I see, I understand," answered Eugénie with interest. "I was sure you were very good. Good people are always happy; I can't quite understand why, but they are. I want to be good very much, and happy too; but I'm afraid I don't know how. I don't think it would make me happy to go and see sick people in dirty cottages. I'm afraid I should only get sick myself, and feel very miserable and very much disgusted. There must be something sadly wrong about me, as I often think."

Constance looked at her almost as one looks at a person who is making a serious-sounding jest; but Eugénie's face was earnest and melancholy, and she spoke in the simplest good faith. Visiting the sick and poor, in close, unpleasant cottages, seemed to her to imply a very great deal of goodness, and to bring with

it a corresponding amount of happiness; and yet her own reason and common sense told her that she would not become a new creature by following Constance's example of cottage visitation. Heaven and happiness were not to be won for her by so simple a method. And yet it perplexed her to know wherein the difference lay between her and the women of whom she heard and read, who seemed so happy over their good works.

"We will talk about it some other day," said Constance smiling. "Perhaps you have got hold of the wrong end of the idea. Perhaps you are confusing cause with effect, or effect with cause. We cannot solve life's greatest problem by a little visiting amongst the sick, you know."

Eugénie looked up quickly.

"Ah, you understand me? I am so glad. I was afraid nobody ever would do that. You will teach me what I want to know."

"I will do whatever I can," answered Constance warmly, "you may trust me."

"And you will be my friends—you and your cousin? I have no friends here."

"I am sure we shall be very glad to be so."

"You must come and see me very often. I have my own rooms, and I am mostly there. You will come and see me, will you not? I must be going now. Gascoigne will be wanting me. But please come very soon. I am so glad I came to-day to see you."



CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HAY-FIELD.

EUGÉNIE drove home that day in a much happier frame of mind. It seemed to her that having already found two friends who could comprehend her difficulties and sympathise with her sorrow, life must of necessity be much brighter and happier for her.

Visions of golden possibilities rose up before her mind's eye. She seemed to see herself a constant welcome guest at Fontbury Park, and her new friends as much at home in her rooms as she was in theirs. Her nature, which so craved something to lean upon, something to love, already in idea, had found support in the persons of these new friends ; and Eugénie was as eager and anxious for the next meeting as if her whole well-being depended upon it.

But poor Eugénie was destined to learn the lesson which experience teaches us all, that friendships are not made in a day, and that hopes and affections centred solely in human love, are apt to prove sadly insufficient and disappointing, however strong and comforting they may be when grounded upon something more lasting than a passing fancy.

Eugénie soon found that the Beauchamps were not

people with whom Lady Durley cared to be intimate; and when Lucile and Constance called next time, her stately and freezing courtesy quite checked any confidential talk; and even when Eugénie went to Fontbury Park again her friends were so surrounded by other friends that she could hardly get more than a few words with them; and it seemed as if the first impulse of mutual affection and promise of friendship had been rudely nipped in the bud.

Eugénie grew increasingly depressed as days passed on, and in the darkness of her spirit it seemed to her as if God and man had turned from her alike, leaving her to battle alone and unaided against a desolation which was bitterer than death itself.

Even her child, as she said in the anguish of her soul, had turned from her. Even her own boy found any company preferable to hers.

This was of course by no means the case. Gascoigne loved his mother with all the strength of a warm little heart. But at the same time the young man liked variety, and was inclined, with that odd instinct of human nature, to hold somewhat cheaply what was always at command, however great its value, and to make an effort to obtain what was really less esteemed, just because it was less easy of attainment.

He had taken a sudden, capricious fancy for his grandmother, since his little attack of illness, and in proportion as she seemed to avoid noticing or caring for him, so he endeavoured to thrust himself before her eyes in every possible way. He trotted about the house after her, whenever he caught sight of her tall figure in corridor or hall. His calls for "Grandy, Gran-dy!" (his baby voice rising an octave at the

last syllable) resounded through the silent house at least half a dozen times a day. He was for ever slipping from nurse or mother to go in search of his grandmother, and the tears of mortification and wounded love would often rise in her eyes, when the child turned from her with the cruel frankness of babyhood, saying,

“Chap doesn’t want *you*—wants Grandy.”

And it seemed as if this spontaneous and wayward love had its own effect upon Lady Durley. She did not make a fuss over the boy, did not notice him very much, nor in any way try to win or to retain his baby heart; but she never repulsed him, never withdrew her hand from the clasp of the tiny fingers, and not only permitted the child to accompany her in her promenades along the terrace, and even on her daily household rounds, but allowed Ross to follow at her heels, and seemed to have forgotten that a dog about the house had hitherto been an abomination in her eyes.

Eugénie, thus left alone, felt herself deserted indeed. She did not pause to reason with her undue depression, to tell herself that little Gascoigne was but showing a child’s natural, healthy love of change in this devotion to his grandmother; that it would be impossible for him to feel always contented by one companion, even his mother, especially when she was so sad at heart and oppressively yearning in her love towards him. He loved her dearly, but then he knew that she was always there, always ready to be his slave and playfellow, whereas “Grandy” could only be approached at certain times, and must be made the most of on those occasions.

Then Eugénie's sadness and loneliness could not but make itself felt even to a little child; and she had always been a somewhat grave and serious young mother. She had never talked nonsense to her child, never taken up his baby words and reproduced them in her own vocabulary, never called him by any name but his own, in spite of his invariable designation of himself by his father's caressing appellation. No doubt it was in a great measure due to this system of hers that Gascoigne spoke so clearly and well; but yet it seemed rather hard to hear from the cold lips of Lady Durley terms of endearment which never fell from her own, and which she felt that a "stranger" had no right to use. The name Gascoigne had never passed the grandmother's lips, and for want of another she had adopted the one the father had taught his child. But to hear any one but Lionel use that name was like gall and wormwood to Eugénie's jealous love, and to her morbid sense of injustice every trifling detail took the form of a deliberate slight.

Before a month had passed, the young wife was in danger of becoming embittered to all the world—her naturally noble nature ruined for want of a hand to guide her thoughts into a wider channel—a channel which should turn them away from herself and her own griefs, and direct them whither they might descend again with a blessing to her and hers.

But the day of awakening came at last, and came so quietly and naturally that it was hardly recognised as such until long afterwards.

Lucile had invited Eugénie to bring her little boy to play in the hay-field, and have gipsy tea there with

a party of little people, who were annually invited to that most delightful of entertainments.

It was a brilliant June day, the heat just tempered by a light breeze, whilst several weeks of sunny weather had made the outdoor world as dry and as warm as heart could wish, even at haymaking time. Altogether it was an ideal summer's day, and the merry party in Fontbury Park seemed of that opinion.

Gascoigne was gloriously happy, for the experience was quite new to him, and his beauty and engaging ways had made him universally admired and petted.

Eugénie, in her maternal pride and pleasure, had been very happy during the earlier hours of the day; but when the tea was over, and the children had gathered round Lucile and Constance to learn some delightful new game, then the old sense of loneliness fell upon her, and she felt that even amongst children she was useless and unattractive, unable to enter into their feelings or to win their love.

She could not emulate Lucile's sweet, motherly adaptiveness to childhood's mood, nor Constance's watchful care over all the weaker and less attractive of the little band. Nobody noticed her or turned to her for sympathy in sorrow or joy. Even Gascoigne clung more to Lucile than to his mother, and was now vociferous in his desire to sit upon her lap and claim her attention as his own.

Sunk in mournful meditation, Eugénie sat apart and unnoticed, and started somewhat violently at finding herself addressed by a not unknown voice.

"I am afraid you have over-tired yourself by your exertions earlier in the day," said Willoughby, seating

himself beside her in the hay. "You look as if you wanted rest."

Willoughby had been himself an indefatigable worker during the first merry hours of the afternoon, and had been the idol of the whole company of children; but he had been called off to see a patient, and had only now returned to the scene of action.

"I am not tired, thank you," answered Eugénie quietly, though the fair, pale face under the shady hat seemed rather to belie her words. "But I am not wanted any more."

Willoughby looked at her quietly, yet keenly. They had not often met, and yet his interest in her remained unabated, and she felt a certain satisfaction in his presence which she could not explain or understand.

"Your little boy looks very well," remarked Willoughby, "and very happy."

"Oh yes," answered Eugénie almost bitterly, "he is very happy, no doubt."

The young man sat more upright than before, and turned his clear gaze fully upon her.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Durley, if I am taking an unwarrantable liberty, but I am sure something is troubling you."

His tone expressed an honest concern and sympathy which brought sudden tears to Eugénie's eyes. She kept her head turned slightly from him, and answered as steadily as she could.

"I suppose we all have our own troubles."

"Yes indeed, the world is full of trouble; but——"

"Ah yes! Indeed, indeed it is!" cried Eugénie with sudden passion. "It is a cruel world! Nothing

but partings for those who love one another, and alienation from those whom we would love."

"Are you speaking this from your own experiences of life?" he asked gently.

"Yes," was the quick answer. "I have been very hardly dealt with. I am only twenty-two—most girls have hardly begun life at that age; but I—I have known so much sorrow! First I lost my father, who was all the world to me; now my dear husband has been taken from me, and oh I dread even to look into the future lest——" She hid her face for a moment in her hands, as if to shut out some haunting vision, and then made a gesture as if to cast away its very remembrance from her. "I have only my child left, and him they are taking from me now."

"Taking your child away!" echoed Willoughby in genuine surprise. "What do you mean?"

Eugénie composed herself by an effort, and turned to him with a smile that was sadder than tears.

"Forgive me," she said, "I was excited. I should not have said so much. Everyone is kind to us here; but Gascoigne is learning to find, what everyone does except my husband—that there is nothing to love in me. He used to love me once, but now he would rather be with anybody else, even his grandmother. Look at him now. He never kisses me as he is kissing Lucile. It is my fault. I cannot make people love me; but with one's only child—it does seem a little—hard."

She stopped suddenly. It was plain she could say no more. Willoughby was full of compassion. He saw at a glance how great was her pain and how needless. His life's work had brought him into contact

with many natures thus preying upon themselves for want of a healthier outlet, and he knew by instinct how matters stood with Eugénie. But he was too wise to argue with her, too well read in human nature to appear to understand over well the symptoms of her mental malady. What he said was kindly spoken, but without any apparent purpose except to change an unpleasant subject.

"Ah, children are heartless little beggars, are they not? But they learn wisdom as they go on. One can hardly look for it at four-years-old. By the by, how is Sir John to-day?"

"I do not know particularly. I suppose he is much the same as usual."

"I have not been up for a day or two; that is why I asked. Do you see much of him?"

"No, hardly anything; only just at meal times. He spends all his time in his study, I think."

"Ah! yes, poor fellow." Willoughby paused awhile, and then said reflectively, "I am afraid he is very ill."

"Ill—is he?"

"He is always ill, and almost always in pain; it is only a question of degree with him," was the answer. "But he has been a good deal worse of late, I fear."

Eugénie's attention was arrested by his gravity, and her ready sympathy was awakened.

"I am sorry. Poor Sir John!"

"Yes, he is very patient; nobody knows what he goes through. He cannot even allow his mother to know all, it distresses her so much; and yet a little womanly sympathy and assistance would be very sweet to him."

Eugénie's eyes opened wide.

"He always seems so cold, so indifferent. I never thought of his wanting anything of that sort."

"He is not cold really, only very shy and retiring. I believe a little help, such as writing letters and reading aloud, would be an immense comfort to him. He is often very much tried by having to do things for himself, and yet he does not like his mother to be distressed by his asking help. I have sometimes wondered whether I might venture to solicit your aid on his behalf. Your assistance would seem natural, and would not alarm Lady Durley."

Eugénie looked attentive and pleased.

"Of course I would do anything I could for—Sir—for John. I did not know he was so ill. I did not know he wanted help. If he would let me, I would write his letters or do anything he wished. I have nothing to do all day."

"I am sure you would be doing a great kindness," said Willoughby. "You can hardly imagine what a sad life his must be, so suffering, so much alone, so little able to enter into what makes up the joys and interests of life. He is very quiet and very patient; but I am sure he feels it keenly."

"Poor John!" said Eugénie with a sigh of sympathy. It seemed to her then as if her own lot were hardly less lonely. Perhaps some bond of common sorrow might draw them together. "I should be glad to do anything I could for him. Do you think it would seem very odd to him?"

"No, I believe he would be too grateful to have room for any other thought."

Eugénie mused awhile, and then said suddenly,

"Dr. Beauchamp, do you believe that God answers prayer?"

"I do," he answered, not seeking to follow her unseen train of thought, but simply giving an emphatic answer, drawn from the depths of personal experience. "I am certain of it."

"He does not answer mine," said Eugénie sadly, "though I have prayed with the earnestness of despair. Sometimes," sinking her voice almost to a whisper, "I wonder if there be a God at all."

"There is a God," answered Willoughby, "and He is very near you, even in your darkest moments. Pray in faith, not in despair, and see what is the result then."

Eugénie gave him one long, questioning gaze, and answered quietly,

"I will try—thank you."





CHAPTER IX.

WITH SIR JOHN.

EUGÉNIE, on her homeward way, thought a good deal of Dr. Beauchamp's words. Since her arrival at Linley Castle she had never spent much consideration over Sir John. He had seemed to her to live the life of a melancholy recluse, and she had felt very little interest in one whom she hardly ever saw.

Now, however, she felt differently.

Willoughby had said he was lonely and suffering, and in need of sympathy and help. The picture touched her imagination, it seemed so like her own condition, only that her pain was mental, not physical, which seemed to her much harder to bear. The craving for love, which was a part of her nature, made the thought of a common sympathy very grateful to her. She resolved to try and help Sir John, and the very idea of so doing brought with it a certain sense of satisfaction and pleasure.

She rose next morning still in the same mind, and forgot to be pained and distressed when Gascoigne trotted off after Lady Durley, as soon as he caught sight of her preparing to go her household rounds.

It was a very hot summer's day, too hot for her to be out of doors with any comfort. Sir John had, as usual, retired to his study after breakfast, and had shut himself up alone.

Eugénie had studied his face that morning as she had never done before, and was shocked to see how worn it was, how deeply furrowed by lines that pain had traced. She had always fancied, with the careless summariness of youth, that her brother-in-law was a very old man; now she realised that he was little over five-and-forty, and that it was not the hand of time which had traced those furrows and hollowed that face into premature old age.

The thought filled her with great compassion, and with that pity which is akin to love. Love, as has most truly been said, casteth out fear, and already Eugénie had almost lost that trepidation which once would have overcome her at the thought of a private interview with Sir John.

A calm, collected manner and a gentle dignity of demeanour were natural to Eugénie when not moved or excited, and when she opened Sir John's study door his start of surprise did not at all discompose her.

She was a very fair vision, as she appeared before a pair of weary eyes—weary even now, ere the day's work had well begun. She was dressed in spotless white, and looked, with her wealth of golden hair, like some tall graceful lily, fair and pure and sweet. She held some roses in her hand, and their fragrance penetrated at once to the keen senses of the invalid. Sir John rose from his seat at the writing-table, and asked,

“Can I do anything for you, my dear?”

"Yes," answered Eugénie in her low sweet tones. "You can sit down here, in your own comfortable easy-chair. You are not fit to be writing this hot morning, and the sun certainly ought not to be allowed to come streaming in. Your room will be like a furnace in an hour's time."

Sir John was so much astonished that he let her place him in his easy leather chair, and make a cool green shade in place of the sunny glare, before he found words to thank or address her.

But as he saw her disposing her roses about his room, with the graceful taste characteristic of all her actions, his silence gave way to his sense of surprise and pleasure.

"My dear," he said gently, "you are very good to an old man."

She turned to him with a winning smile.

"If I am, I shall expect the 'old man' to obey me implicitly, and to do no more work until I give him leave."

He smiled gratefully, but shook his head.

"I should like to follow so pleasant a prescription, but business is business, Eugénie. I have six letters to answer."

"Long and important ones?" she asked, with her head on one side.

"Not very long to any but my slow fingers; but they must not be delayed."

"Then I will write these important epistles myself," said Eugénie, seating herself at the writing-table and selecting a pen. "I constitute myself the private secretary."

"But my dear——"

"But, Sir John, I think you will agree with me that business is business, and does not admit of delay. These, I suppose, are the letters which require answers. There they are. Now you must dictate, and tell me how to spell the long words. I'm afraid my ideas are sadly phonetic."

Eugénie had triumphed. Sir John, taken by storm, made no further comment. He quietly dictated the brief and business-like notes, which were rapidly transcribed by her quick fingers. In an hour the task was easily accomplished, which would have given him a morning of painful, weary toil.

"My dear," he said with a look of such sincere gratitude that her heart was touched, "I am very much obliged to you."

"I shall put that profession to the proof," answered Eugénie with great gravity. "If you are, I shall expect to be allowed to retain my post."

Sir John put out his hand towards his sister-in-law with a gesture which said more than the words,

"What have I done, Eugénie, that you should do so much for me?"

She came and knelt down before him and laid her hands in his; her eyes looked earnestly at him as she spoke.

"You are Lionel's brother," she said gently, "and you are ill. I did not understand, I did not know. I have been very blind and selfish. But I know now, and I want very much to help you, if you will let me. Please do not send me away."

He took her face between his hands and kissed her. It was the first kiss he had given her. All her shyness had vanished now. She had learned in one

short hour—how she could not have told—that she had found some one worthy of her love and confidence, some one whom she could help, and who could help her.

“If I thought it would not be sad for you, I could wish you ever in my sight,” he said smilingly. “Do you know how the sick always long after beauty?”

She smiled and stood up beside him, smoothing the scanty hair away from his hollow temples. How white and hollow they looked!

“You are so ill!” she said pityingly. “You have so much pain to bear. I wish I could bear it for you.”

“So do not I, my dear,” he said quietly; and there was more meaning in his words than she could quite understand. She asked him tenderly,

“Will you ever be better?”

“Some day—some day,” he answered with a peaceful smile; and his smile said so much more than his words that Eugénie cried, with an involuntary shrinking from the thought,

“Oh please do not talk so!”

He looked up at her with the same quiet smile.

“Ah, my dear, life looks very bright to you in the misty, summer’s morning of your youth and health and happiness. You are like the traveller, who sees his way lying before him, half in sunshine, half in shade, but all wrapped in a golden haze of hope’s bright radiance. The journey looks fair and easy—all is light and brightness: there is no weariness in the early morning hours. You young travellers have not learned to long for the rest of home. But I have travelled over a rough road—not that I would com-

plain; I have much, very much, to be thankful for—and I have grown weary and sad at times, and the golden light has left the road and only shines upon the hill-tops and in the country that lies beyond. Is it wrong, is it dreadful, does it seem sad to you, that I should sometimes long to lay my burden down and enter into that good land ‘where the weary are at rest’?”

Eugénie did not answer all at once. She had slipped down to her former position, kneeling at his feet. Her sweet eyes swam in tears.

“Oh do not, do not!” she pleaded. “I know we must all die—but death is so dark, so dreadful!”

“Ah!” he said in the same dreamy way, “dark, is it? Perhaps so, perhaps so; ‘the valley of the shadow,’ as we call it.” He mused awhile, a half smile playing over his wasted features, and then he went on speaking slowly and softly. “Shadow! Shadow, not darkness. And is not shadow often a blessed thing? After the long, hot summer’s day, when the sun has shone in all its might upon us, do we not say when it sinks to rest, and the shades of evening come stealing in, ‘The shadow is the best.’ I often think, as I sit and watch the gentle change, that when life’s hot, struggling day is over, and we feel the shadows of the dark valley closing around us, whilst the sun goes down—the sun of our life, with its heat and light all burnt out—that we perhaps, and even those about us, will say, ‘The shadow is the best.’”

Eugénie’s head had sunk upon her hands. She was moved—bewildered——distressed.

“I can’t bear to talk—to think of such things—when Lionel——”

His hand went down upon her head and caressed the golden ripples of her hair.

"I cannot, *cannot* bear to think—I may never see him again!" she cried passionately.

"Poor child!" he murmured, "poor child, I did not mean to distress you. Forgive my selfishness. I was not thinking of Lionel."

"I know; but I am always thinking of him. Everything seems to tell me that—that—he may never come back to me again."

Sir John continued to caress her bowed head, feeling that even a touch of sympathy comforted her, and wondered what he should say. Was it kinder to try and ignore the perils surrounding the soldier at his post, the changes and chances of his life, and persuade her that he must and would come back safe and sound?—or would it be the truer kindness to help her to conquer her anxious doubts and fears by a trust and resignation which is able to say through good and ill alike, "Thy will be done"?

"My dear," he said very gently, "God's goodness is very great, and our prayers for Lionel go up continually to His presence. 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.' We must have faith in His goodness."

"Yes, yes, I know," answered Eugénie quickly; "but other people have prayed, and yet soldiers are killed every year. It is very hard to believe God hears. Oh, if my Lionel——"

"Hush, my child! We *must* trust our heavenly Father's loving wisdom. Whatever He does must be for the best."

"No! no! not always!" cried Eugénie with the

passionate appeal of a young untried nature. "It could not be right to take my husband from me."

Sir John said no more. What could he say? How could he show her that death was not the dark blackness of annihilation which was her only real ideal, whatever her belief might be?

His silence made her look up appealingly.

"You think me very wicked?"

"Indeed no," he answered gently. "I wish I could comfort you."

"You have," she said quickly. "You have been kind and good. Why cannot I be like you, think like you, and those other good people I see and read about? They can trust God, and love Him through everything. They are not afraid of death or anything. Why am I afraid? Death! Oh it is too dark, too dreadful!" She covered her face with her hands and shuddered. "I should like to pray that death might never come near me or mine!"

Sir John did not answer for a while, and when he spoke it was to take up the old metaphor.

"When we see the summer sun go down, and are glad, or almost glad, to see it go, and are content with the cool shadows of night, why are we glad and content?"

Eugénie gazed at him, but answered nothing.

"I think we are glad because we know the light is only veiled, not extinguished. We know that it is shining somewhere still, and that the sun will rise again in all his majesty when the short night is over. And so it is with us, who trust in the Saviour, when our light goes down and we enter into the shadowy valley. We know there is light on the other side. We know we shall find our life again, glorified and purified, waiting for us when

the shadowy passage is over. Why should we be afraid of that one dark passage, either for ourselves or others? Once over the river, and there is no darkness ever again. My dear, if it should seem best to our Heavenly Father to call upon you to resign one whom you greatly love, will you not try to think of the light upon the other side, instead of the shadow here? Will you not try to bear in mind how short the night of any earthly parting is; and how long the bright day of reunion somewhere else, the day of eternity which knows no partings?"

"Ah!" cried Eugénie, holding out her hands in a sort of wild appeal, "teach me how—teach me how."

He took her hands in his, and looked into her face, his eyes eloquent with feeling.

"What can I teach you, dear child? I would do anything for you that I could."

"Teach me to think as you do, to feel as you do. Help me to be good!"

He smiled half-sadly half-wistfully.

"Would that I could—that I were worthy. My dear, you must not make an ideal of me."

"You are so much better than I," she said simply, "I feel to need a pattern."

"Ah yes, we all need that; and thank God we have it. My child, you know Who is our one and only Pattern, in Whose footsteps we must try and tread."

She shook her head, he hardly knew whether in dissent or in despair.

"I think you do," he persisted gently, "and you need not shrink because the ideal is high. The higher, grander, nobler our pattern, the higher we are likely to

rise in our endeavour to copy it. There has been One before us, who knew what it was to bear the cross, and no cross we are asked to carry is half so heavy as His. He bore the cross, and now He wears the crown. He has told us (and His words cannot fail) that those who follow His footsteps in patient humility and love, bearing their cross for the sake of Him who bore the sins of the whole world on His, shall in no wise be forgotten or forsaken, and shall in no wise lose their reward—the crown of life laid up for all who are faithful unto death. Therefore I say to you, my child, follow the Pattern given to us, in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”





CHAPTER X.

HOW THE CURE WORKED.

THAT talk with Sir John in his study, was the beginning of a new era in Eugénie's life at Linley Castle. It did for her what she so sorely needed, took her out of herself, and gave her an interest in one, whose heart was free to yield her the loving sympathy her nature craved.

The bond which had thus suddenly formed itself between Sir John Durley and his beautiful young sister-in law was destined to be strengthened by the occurrences of the following days.

Within a week of Eugénie's first visit to his study, Sir John was laid low by a sudden access of illness which utterly prostrated his strength, and taxed even his powers of endurance to their utmost limit.

This sudden attack did not last many days, thanks to the prompt and skilful measures taken by Willoughby Beauchamp, and during that time Eugénie was a very great deal with the sick man, and suddenly developed a latent power, of which she had hitherto been ignorant—that gift of nursing and tending the sick, which comes by nature far more than by training.

Lady Durley took the night-watches. She could never endure to leave her son by night when he was ill enough to require watching then; but by day she was forced to leave him to take rest, for she always suffered herself when Sir John was ill, and Eugénie had full scope for her energies during the greater part of the day.

In the quiet of that sick-room, she learnt many lessons. In the fortitude and resignation she witnessed, she found much food for meditation. At the time it happened she was hardly conscious of learning anything, her whole soul was absorbed by the one great wish to relieve suffering, and gratify every wish expressed by the sick man. But her receptive nature was taking in new impressions every hour, and her spiritual nature was making imperceptible growth by day and night, although the time for blossom and fruition was not yet.

Eugénie was a beautiful reader, and her low, musical voice often soothed Sir John more than anything else. There is only one Book which seems to suit the ears of those upon whom God's hand is lying somewhat heavily, one Book which reveals fresh meaning and a deeper significance, when read in the dim quietness of the sick-room.

Eugénie believed that the Bible had been familiar enough to her from childhood; yet during these long hours, when she read to the suffering man chapter after chapter of promise, precept, and blessed assurance of love and remembrance, it seemed to her that she had never before learned to know one tithe of what the Word of God contained.

Sir John did not talk very much; but from time to time some expression passed his lips, revealing to

Eugénie a depth of love, of trust, of resignation, in the face of which her own doubt and indifference seemed to rise up and look her in the face with an awful reproach and indignation.

Half a lifetime of thought seemed to be concentrated into four days; and when Sir John began to amend, Eugénie felt as if a new page of her life had been opened before her.

Little change appeared outwardly. She was still grave, quiet, preoccupied; but the morbid self-pity and suspicion of those around her had vanished. Her mind no longer preyed upon itself; she had learned to think of others.

She had seen a good deal of Willoughby Beauchamp during these nursing days; and a curious sort of friendship had sprung up between them, which had deepened with time.

Eugénie felt that Willoughby understood her and did her good. Willoughby felt that Eugénie was possessed of a very noble nature, which only wanted planting in congenial soil to develop into beauty and usefulness; but he doubted if it had already found that which it craved.

Upon the first day that Sir John was able to get to his study, he asked for Gascoigne; and the child came trotting in, very pleased to be admitted to the room which contained his mother. For the boy had learned to value Eugénie's society, now that it had been partially withdrawn from him; and his loving caresses and calls for "Mamsey" had been as balm to the mother's heart.

Gascoigne looked gravely at his uncle's white, thin face, and said, "Poor, poor Uncle John—been so very

ill," and shook his head in token of comprehension and sympathy; after which he made Ross offer his paw to the sick man an indefinite number of times, and then sat down at his mother's feet to play with his favourite, and make her do the same.

Sir John watched the little group with half-closed eyes, a slight smile playing over his face. It was very pleasant, he thought, that such pretty living pictures should be brought before him in his sickness and solitude. He wished that his mother could be added—he wished that she were sitting in her easy-chair, in its accustomed place opposite to him; but Lady Durley, though uniformly kind to Eugénie, and grateful in a way for her attention to her son, seldom came into his room when she was there, and seemed at times a little inclined to look coldly upon the attachment which was evidently growing up between Sir John and his sister-in-law.

Eugénie was, so far, unconscious of this; but Sir John knew and loved his mother too well not to feel with acute sensibility any indication of feeling on her part. He deplored, without seeing any way of combating, this unspoken prejudice which had taken hold of Lady Durley's mind.

At the present moment he felt serenely contented. He was more at ease physically, than he had been for many long weeks; and the sight of Eugénie playing with her child, soothed and refreshed his spirit.

The door opened and admitted the doctor, who looked round him with manifest approval.

"Ah, this is well, this is something like. No, Mrs. Durley do not move. I see there is nothing for me to do this morning. You are better, Sir John?"

"Much better. Ah, what a thing it is to get rid of pain!"

"Indeed yes. You have had a vicious attack this time. I trust you will have a corresponding period of ease."

"I will hope so," answered Sir John with his patient smile. "I owe very much of my quick recovery, I am firmly convinced, to my kind nurse over there."

Eugénie looked up with a smile. Willoughby crossed the room and stood beside her.

"You have been invaluable to me," he said in his quiet, kindly way. "You feel keenly, and yet not too much. I can speak to you as I cannot to Lady Durley, and you never forget. Kindness, firmness, and a good memory, are excellent qualifications for a nurse."

"I am glad I was able to help you," answered Eugénie simply.

"And you do not look any the worse for your labour of love."

"No; I am very strong. Hard work never hurts me."

He looked down at her smiling.

"You look better in every way than you did ten days ago."

Her eyes met his frankly.

"Yes, I am much happier."

"You find your life less loveless, less useless than you had believed it?"

"Yes, I hope so," she answered. "I think that I was wrong to give way as I did; but things looked very dark then. When you sent me to help John,

you thought of him ; but I think he did more for me than I for him."

Willoughby's thoughtful smile played over his face. Gascoigne was chattering to his uncle, and no one could overhear what passed between the other two.

"There are two sides to every question," he said, "and no act of ours can fail to recoil upon ourselves, either for good or ill. The longer we live, the more we see the truth of this. The more we live for others, and the less for self, the happier we shall be."

Eugénie's face looked at once grave and pleading.

"I wish I could."

"Could do what ?"

"Do more for others. My life is such a selfish one ; and when I am idle, as I so often am, I cannot help brooding and thinking too much of myself. I do want to be better—more like John, or you, or Lionel."

Eugénie had not yet lost her old idea that by doing and working she might gain that calm peace of mind, after which she was striving. Willoughby remembered something which Constance had told him, and smiled ; but he did not discourage her.

"If you want to work for others, Mrs. Durley, you have a wide field before you."

"I know ; but how could I begin ? What could I do ? All the Linley tenants are so comfortable. I went to a few of the cottages one day ; but nobody wanted anything."

"There is plenty of poverty in Fontbury," remarked Willoughby with a half sigh.

"Amongst your patients ?"

"Why yes ; and everywhere else too."

Eugénie looked at him half timidly.

"Constance Seymour helps you, does she not?"

"Yes indeed; nobly."

"And—I suppose—she does everything. There would not be anything left for me?"

Willoughby's face expressed both gratitude and pleasure.

"Do you really wish for some of my patients to look after, Mrs. Durley?"

"Yes, if you have any—if you think I should be any good."

"Constance shall tell you all that," he answered smiling. "I had better put you into her hands. She will help you to an understanding at starting better than I. You would like to go with her some day on her rounds?"

Eugénie's face brightened visibly.

'Ah yes; so much. When will she go next? Do you think she would take me?"

"I am sure of it; and then you could see whether, after such an experience, you cared to make a trial yourself. You may be disgusted by what you see and hear."

Eugénie did not protest; she looked thoughtful and said,

"I should like to try, please. May I go with Constance to-morrow, if she will let me?"

Lady Durley and her daughter-in-law lunched together that day. The household had grown somewhat irregular during Sir John's illness, and even now he did not appear at table; but had something sent to him in his study. It seemed a good opportunity for Eugénie to speak of her new plan, and

when the servants had left the room, she opened the subject.

"You will not mind my giving a part of my time to—to—well I hardly know what it will be yet—but to helping the poor, and visiting them when they are ill, in their own homes? I feel as though I ought to try and do more than I do for other people."

Lady Durley looked rather surprised; but merely said in her stately way,

"You are entirely mistress of your own movements, my dear."

"Thank you," answered Eugénie looking relieved. "I am glad you do not mind."

"Certainly not. When I was younger I visited the tenants a good deal."

"Yes, I know," answered Eugénie, "they told me so; but I do not mean the tenants here. I mean the poor people in Fontbury. Dr. Beauchamp says there is a great deal of poverty there. He sees so much of it, and I want to help him."

Lady Durley's face changed at once.

"That is a different matter altogether," she said. "Surely you do not propose becoming a district nurse under Dr. Beauchamp?"

"No—not that—at least I don't know exactly what I shall do," answered Eugénie, confused, she hardly knew why, by Lady Durley's manner. "Constance Seymour will show me to-morrow."

"Most unsuitable," was the cold rejoinder. "You have not the least idea what it is you are undertaking; and you will get mixed up with the Beauchamps in a manner which is not at all proper to your position,"

"I do not understand," said poor Eugénie, distressed and bewildered.

"No, my dear, you do not understand. You have no experience of English life and its social duties and responsibilities, therefore you must be guided by those who are older and wiser than yourself. Those Beauchamps are very pushing people. They would, I do not doubt, be delighted to draw you into their set, and vaunt their intimacy before all the world; but it cannot be allowed."

Eugénie was too much puzzled and troubled to make any rejoinder.

"No doubt you have seen as much for yourself," continued Lady Durley calmly. "I think that young doctor is the worst of the family."

"I am sure he is a very good man," said Eugenie.

"Indeed. I hope he is. I do not know much of him; but John thinks well of him, which is certainly in his favour."

Lady Durley seemed to consider the matter at an end; but Eugénie mustered her courage, and said with a quiet firmness not unworthy of Lady Durley herself,

"I shall keep the appointment I made with Miss Seymour for to-morrow afternoon; but I will not undertake any work upon my own account until I have spoken to you again."

Lady Durley was a wise woman, and knew when to give way.

"Very well, my dear, do so," she said, "but be careful. Fontbury is a very unhealthy place, especially in hot weather. It would be quite impossible, on your child's account, to carry out any such scheme as you proposed just now. You would be certain to bring

home some infection before a week was out ; and I am sure you would never forgive yourself, if your zealousness for others was paid for at the boy's expense."

This shaft struck home. Lady Durley felt that she had triumphed.





CHAPTER XI.

WILLOUGHBY BEAUCHAMP.

WILLOUGHBY BEAUCHAMP sat over a book and a cup of tea, in his own rooms in the heart of Fountbury. He had comfortable quarters enough—two large quaint parlours over one of the best shops in the place, a bed-room behind, and the almost exclusive use of a good-sized old-fashioned garden. His surgery he had put up for himself in a corner of this same garden, and it was entered from a different street; but a bell therefrom hung in his private room, and its frequent summons gave him little leisure for the studies he would fain have prosecuted in his spare hours.

To-day, however, the bell was silent, and the heat of a midsummer's afternoon seemed to keep people within doors. The doctor, who had been out all the earlier hours of the day, was enjoying the coolness of his room and the fragrance of his favourite beverage, in undisturbed solitude and quietness; for so still was the street without, that hardly any sound beyond a drowsy hum floated in at the open lattice of the old-fashioned oriel window.

Moments such as these were rare enough with

Willoughby to be highly prized. For a moment he felt disappointed to hear the sound of voices below and then ascending footsteps. His door was opened without ceremony, and two intruders entered.

"Willoughby! You in at this time!" exclaimed Constance Seymour in accents of surprise. "The last thing I expected. I must explain our intrusion."

"No need—I am delighted to see you. Mrs. Durley, you look very tired. Let me recommend this chair. It is shabby but comfortable. Mrs. Adams shall bring up more tea. I am sure you will not refuse so feminine a form of refreshment. You have had a hot day for your rounds, Constance."

"Yes, we have. I am afraid I have tired out Eugénie. Willoughby, I ordered Mrs. Durley's phaeton to meet us here at five o'clock, to take her home. I did not know what other place to say. I never imagined we should disturb you at such an hour, though I know you do not mind."

"I am very glad I chanced to be in—it is not usual at this hour," and then he looked at Eugénie and asked with a smile,

"Well, Mrs. Durley, what have you made of your first experiences?"

Eugénie was looking pale. Heat did not tan or flush her; but rather seemed to steal away the faint colour she possessed at other times. Her eyes looked large and bright, her lips grave and thoughtful.

"I have learnt a great deal," she answered simply.

He looked at her inquiringly, and presently she went on slowly and thoughtfully,

"I never understood before what it was like to

be poor. I think if I had nothing to give them, I would rather not know such things."

"But you have something to give them," said Willoughby smiling, but Eugénie shook her head.

"No I have not—at least not much. I do not understand business, and Sir John and Lady Durley arrange everything. I do not think she would let me have much money to give to the people at Fontbury."

"I was not thinking of money," answered Willoughby. "You would soon find that without great discrimination and experience, money would do more harm than good in most cases."

Eugénie lifted her eyebrows in surprise.

"I do not understand. They must want money most dreadfully—think how wretched their homes are, their children, themselves. How can they do better without money?"

Willoughby still looked at her smiling.

"And suppose you were to give ten pounds to one of these miserable people, Mrs. Durley, do you suppose that in a month's time their home would be less wretched, their children less untidy? Do you think your money would be spent in sanitary reform?"

Eugénie sat silent and perplexed.

"How can I tell?" she said at length. "I don't understand such things; but I know they must want money."

"Very true; but let them work for it first. Be very, very cautious how you act, lest your generosity lead to idleness and discontent. Keep your alms for the sick, the aged, and the fatherless children. God forbid that they should be forgotten; but be very

cautious lest your money bring a curse rather than a blessing. Ah! I have seen so much of that."

"Willoughby, you are perplexing her," interposed Constance, coming to the rescue. "Everyone feels like that at first. She will understand better by-and-by. It is so hard to know what is right at first, and to distinguish cause from effect."

But Eugénie was still looking at Willoughby.

"Tell me," she said. "I want to know. If you do not give them money, what can you give?"

"Good news," he answered simply.

"I have none," she said. "I do not know what could be good news to them."

"The good news of the Gospel," he answered quietly. "Mrs. Durley, if you wish to help your less fortunate sisters and brothers, you must do so by telling them—ay, and bringing home to their hearts—the good news of God. In this life they cannot but toil and suffer—the immutable laws of the universe decree that there must always be poor and needy amongst us; and do as we will, we cannot greatly lighten the burden of suffering that weighs them down. But this we can do—we can teach them to look beyond this present life of toil; we can teach them that as certainly as they toil here, they may rest hereafter, as they suffer here, they shall rejoice by-and-by. All troubles are bearable when a certain hope is held out for the future; and Christ died as much for each one of these poor, slaving, toil-worn men and women, as for those friends for whom He said He laid down His life. Make them understand that. Make them take Christ at His word, and see in Him their Saviour and Redeemer. Let them go to Him to wash away their

sins; and they will find in Him so true a Friend, so kind a Father, that their lives even here will not be utterly dark, and the glorious future will lie brightly before them. Give them tender sympathy in their sorrow. Let them see that you feel for them, that you own the common tie of universal brotherhood; and then they will the more easily understand you when you tell them of the Fatherhood of God, the love of Christ, the sanctifying grace of the Spirit of God. Do not go in your own strength, with your own poor gifts alone in your hand—go in the power of God, and take His message amongst them. Tell them that they may be heirs of a glorious inheritance—that the troubles they suffer now shall all be forgotten in time to come, if they will but grasp the Redemption that is held out to them.”

Eugénie was silent. It was not easy for her companions to trace the cause of this silence, or to see what effect Willoughby's earnestness had produced upon her.

When at last she spoke, it was in a low quiet tone that seemed studiously composed—

“I am afraid I am not at all suited to such work. I was afraid so when I heard Constance talk to the sick and poor this afternoon. I am so very ignorant myself, I should always be making mistakes. I should like to have helped you, Dr. Beauchamp; but I am afraid I should do more harm than good.”

“No, indeed,” answered Willoughby quickly; for he feared he had unconsciously hurt her feelings. “Indeed you are wrong to reach such a conclusion. I have watched you beside a sick bed. I know your powers, your capabilities; and I believe you would be

the happier for the exercise of them. Mrs. Durley, I am convinced that God meant each one of us to do *something* towards bringing about the fulfilment of our daily prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come.' Do not be discouraged if you feel perplexed at first by world-puzzling problems. Light and guidance will be granted you— never doubt that."

"You will think me very inconsistent and fickle, I suppose," said Eugénie after a pause, "but I do not think that I shall be able to do what I wished and intended yesterday."

Willoughby smiled pleasantly.

"You need not look so grave over it, Mrs. Durley. There are so many ways in which we can help on God's work in the world, that we can hardly be so placed as to be incapable of service. My patients and I shall be the losers; but we must not be selfish. Others will profit by our loss."

"No, I am afraid not," answered Eugénie, rising and pulling on her gloves. "I am not likely to be of any use in the world. I do not understand things as you do. I hear the carriage below. Shall I drive you home, Constance?—or do you want to give your report to Dr. Beauchamp?"

Constance and Willoughby had a good deal to talk over, so Eugénie departed alone. When the doctor returned from attending her to the carriage, Constance greeted him with the words—

"I believe that is Lady Durley's doing. She did not say so; but I gathered it."

"Not improbable," answered Willoughby thoughtfully; "and perhaps Lady Durley may be right."

"Right!"

"Yes ; I am not quite sure if she has the strength for it yet—or whether her mind is in a fit state. She could hardly bear the sight of present distress, if she could not see the brightness beyond. She needs taking out of herself ; but then she has Sir John and the child. She is quite right not to set up her will in opposition to that of her mother-in-law."

"I suppose so ; but it seems hard."

"Does it ? I think the lesson of submission is a very needful one, and very hard to learn. She is but two-and-twenty ; her husband is far away. She should have some controlling hand over her, and Lady Durley is a good woman, though somewhat severe."

"Do you know much of her ?"

"No, but little personally ; but I hear a good deal in one way or another. We are not favourites of hers at present, you know, Constance : but that is no reason why we should be prejudiced."

Constance looked admiringly at him. She was a woman of few words and many thoughts. All she said was—

"I will try to think as you do, Willoughby," and her unspoken thought ran thus, "How can any one be so blind as not to see your worth ?"

Willoughby mused awhile and then added—

"Submission is a hard lesson—resignation a harder one still. Do you know that affairs in Afghanistan begin to look very bad ?"

Constance's face grew suddenly grave.

"Frank was saying something of the kind ; but I did not think the newspaper reports so bad."

"Soldiers read between the lines," said Willoughby. "I was with Major Clifford to-day, and he thought

matters getting very serious. He has been a long while in India, and knows that part of the country well. He believes the fighting will be severe."

"I wonder if Eugénie knows. She said nothing to me."

"No doubt they try to keep her mind at ease as far as possible; but that is not always the truest kindness."

"Poor girl!" said Constance tenderly. "She is wrapped up in her husband and her child."

"There is something very interesting about her, in her youth and isolation and inexperience. You will stand her friend, I know, Constance."

"I will do whatever I can. I am sure she trusts me; we are friends already; but I cannot help being reserved, and she is the same, especially on those subjects which I know we both wish to discuss. Perhaps in time, that will wear off."

"Most likely."

And then the subject of Eugénie was dropped, and that of Willoughby's patients and convalescents introduced. There was a great deal to be thought of and talked over, and the common bond of a deep-rooted love for mankind brought those two hearts very near together, as was always the case when they discussed those matters to which both gave so much time and thought. It seemed as if they understood one another by a mutual, instinctive sympathy. Clear headed, warm-hearted, and intensely in earnest over their labour of love, they seemed fitted indeed to work together as life-partners in whatever lay before them.

Some such thought as this seemed to be in Willoughby's mind when Constance had left him alone.

He sat for a long while musing deeply, his head

upon his hand; and then a sigh broke from him—an unusual expression of feeling.

“It is a sweet dream,” he murmured, “my life’s companion, my help-meet, my Constance. A sweet, dream indeed; but ought I to indulge it? Would it be right to her?—right to those for whom I now toil, to whom I have sometimes all but vowed to dedicate my life? She would be my right hand, my best helper; but then—I am a poor man, and though I have enough for my own needs, and enough to supply the needs of others, I could not keep Constance in such surroundings as she has been used to. As a married man, I could not go on as I now do, giving my time and skill to those who are poor, rather than selling it to those who are rich. The day is all too short as it is. If I had to give more time to my wealthier patients, I should have less for my poor people. Ah, sweet Constance—you would be the first to bid me place my duty towards humanity above my own personal happiness. Yet the choice is hard, and grows harder month by month. Thank God, she does not feel as I do, does not share my feeling. To her I am but a well-loved brother and early friend. Would that she were but as a sister to me. Ah, Constance, Constance, I must learn patience, and try and see my way out of the tangled path where love and duty seem to struggle together for mastery. But in time all will be made plain—that I do not doubt. My prayer must be ‘Thy will be done.’ The rest will follow. I shall be guided aright.”



CHAPTER XII.

HER OWN WILL.

EUGÉNIE drove home in a thoughtful mood, somewhat troubled and perplexed by all the ideas that had been awakened within her by her experiences of the day.

No clear notion as to what it was she wanted, had as yet formed itself in her mind. All she knew was that there was in her soul some void which she longed to fill, some restless craving after a peace and satisfaction which she had never really known, some unfulfilled ideal after which she was blindly groping, and which seemed to elude her even when she most hoped to grasp it.

Eugénie was very young still, and her nature quite undeveloped. Capabilities of much that was good and great she undoubtedly possessed. But at present her mind seemed one great maze of doubt and uncertainty, to which she possessed no clue, and she was more of a puzzle to herself at this time than to any of her friends.

So long as her husband had been with her, she had looked to him for everything, and in the light of

his love, life had appeared smooth and bright; but now that he was gone all the light had faded, and it seemed to her that she had been left alone to wrestle out life's problems by herself.

Very greatly did Eugénie long to become "more worthy," as she humbly expressed it, of the husband she so truly loved. All her faults and failings seemed to her to stand out in black relief. Her life looked a poor, empty thing, and yet what could she do to ennoble it?

She wanted above all things to "be good" and to feel the peaceful assurance of God's favour, of which she believed all good people were conscious; but how could this goodness be attained?

In her new life she had struggled hard to be patient, gentle, self-sacrificing; and she had not to reproach herself so far with any act of insubordination towards the mother-in-law, whom she feared more than loved. With Sir John she had done more—she had learned to be very fond of him. Lionel would be pleased by that and by her conduct, and yet Eugénie was keenly conscious that more was wanted than a gentle resignation to circumstances to make her truly happy.

What could she do?

She read her Bible with unaccustomed diligence. She prayed longer and more earnestly than before; and yet she never felt that assurance of being heard which she so craved.

What was wanting in her? What made the difference between her and others?

Was it because she lived in idle luxury, and did nothing to lighten the load that lay upon others?

This idea had often struggled into Eugénie's mind, and although it had not been altogether welcome, she had faced it honestly, and had even acquired a wish to do some of the work which occupied the time and thought of so many people whom she would gladly imitate.

Dr. Beauchamp's words, and what she heard of his life, had further roused her upon this point, and had led to the expedition of this afternoon; and now that it was over, what was the result?

Eugénie had been much moved, much distressed by what she had seen; but she felt utterly helpless to cope with the sin and misery she had witnessed. If she could not give money freely and lavishly, wherever she seemed to see a want of it, what could she do?

Constance had brought the light to dim eyes, the colour into wan faces, by sweet words, which had no deep meaning in them for Eugénie. Constance had given counsel, sympathy, encouragement or rebuke, with a quiet firmness and comprehension quite beyond the grasp of her companion; and what she had to give away was given with a judicious kindness and justice which Eugénie felt it hopeless to emulate.

Dr. Beauchamp had plainly said that what the people wanted was not so much money, as the good news of God, and a tender, comprehensive human sympathy.

Sympathy Eugénie might be able to give, but not comprehension; and as for the first—the good news of God, how could she impart to others what she was so vainly seeking after herself?

No, this sort of work was not suited to her, nor

she to it; Eugénie felt this keenly, and yet felt strangely loth to give up her half-formed plan.

Almost unknown to her, this thought had shaped itself in her brain—the wish that it might be her duty to oppose Lady Durley, and go on her own way in a martyr-like spirit; sacrificing all to the call of God.

Eugénie had resented the way in which her mother-in-law had spoken of her friends. She was much too young, and had lived far too changing a life, to have learned tolerance for the old-world notions which gradually wrap round those whose lives flow steadily and slowly in one channel from youth to old age. She thought Lady Durley very much more arrogant and proud than she really was, and would much have enjoyed coming out victorious from a battle with her unreasonable prejudices.

She had spoken to Constance about infection for herself and Gascoigne, and had been reassured upon that point. Willoughby was most careful, Constance said, both for her and for Lucile's children, who were so much with her; and a doctor knows so well where danger is and where it is not, that she never had a moment's uneasiness; and in fact felt more secure in visiting Willoughby's poor patients, than she did in doing her own shopping and business in other parts of the somewhat unhealthy town.

Eugénie's one fear was thus set at rest; but she was very careful as yet to pledge herself to anything. She chafed inwardly at her mother-in-law's control, yet she was too loyal to her husband's name to allow any one to see this. Her mind was in an unsettled state. She did not herself know what

she meant to do, and she certainly could say nothing of her intentions to others.

Her mind was very full of thought as she drove home, and her instinct of insubordination rose gradually higher and higher.

Why should she be dictated to by Lady Durley? She was not a child; but a married woman, with a position and dignity of her own to uphold. It was not right to give way too much. She would assert herself upon this matter, which she tried to persuade herself was one of conscience. She would do what was right, even if she had to suffer for it; and it must be right, so she told herself, to emulate Willoughby Beauchamp and Constance Seymour.

For the moment all thoughts of her husband, and what his wishes would be, were in abeyance. His gentle counsels of submission to his mother's will were all forgotten. All that Eugénie now thought was that it behoved Mrs. Lionel Durley to assert herself at last, and show that she did possess a will of her own, and a determination to do what was right in spite of every one.

When she reached the Castle she found tea waiting for her upon the terrace; and Sir John and his mother occupying their usual seats there.

They had been talking together in low and rather anxious tones before she appeared; but their voices died away as she approached.

Eugénie was too much occupied with her own feelings to spare any thought for others. She took her seat, and fanned herself gently with her hat.

"I am afraid you are hot and tired, my love," said Lady Durley with unusual gentleness. "Let me pour you out a cup of tea."

"Thank you, but I can do it myself. I had an excellent cup of tea at Dr. Beauchamp's a little while ago, which was very refreshing. It is a lovely day. I do enjoy heat."

She expected a very severe comment to be made upon her conduct in regard to the cup of tea at Dr. Beauchamp's; but to her surprise nobody made any observation. Indeed, had she been more observant of her companions, she might have noticed that they were both looking somewhat anxious and constrained, and were unusually silent.

"I have had such an interesting afternoon," said Eugénie after a pause. "I never knew before what a great deal of suffering and sadness there is in the world. I do so want to help to relieve it."

Sir John bent his head in a sort of assent.

"God grant we may all be able to do something towards that great work."

The gravity of his tone surprised Eugénie; and she wondered why Lady Durley did not speak. Turning to her she added—

"I find there is no fear of infection, so long as I work under Dr. Beauchamp. I cannot now see any reason why I should not do so. Can you?"

"We will talk about it another time, my dear," answered Lady Durley quietly. "I do not wish to oppose anything that may conduce to your happiness; but things are better not taken up in a hurry."

Eugénie was almost disappointed at the kindly moderation of this reply. She had braced herself for a struggle, and would have liked to fight it out then and there. Annoyance, and a sensation of being in the wrong, made her next words unusually incisive.

"My mind is quite made up. I shall ask Dr. Beauchamp for a list of people to visit, the next time I see him."

Lady Durley made no immediate rejoinder. There was rather an awkward pause, which Sir John broke by saying quietly—

"We shall see, we shall see."

"Yes, we shall," answered Eugénie in the same tone. "I am tired of wasting my life. I suppose it was given me for some purpose. I dare not fritter it all away, even to gratify the feelings of my relations. My husband would approve, I am sure—"

And then Eugénie stopped suddenly short, feeling by an instinctive flash of conviction that what she had said was not true.

"My dear," said Lady Durley very kindly, as she rose quietly to her feet and glanced towards her son, "we will do our very best to make you happy with us; and if we do not quite agree in our ideas, we must try to bear and forbear, and learn the secret of mutual accommodation. Whatever you think it your duty to do, you shall do, as far as is possible to your position here."

And then Lady Durley moved slowly away, leaving Eugénie breathless with astonishment at her manner.

She looked into Sir John's grave face, and her own grew suddenly white.

"Something has happened," she began; and though he gave a half negative, she would not listen but sprang to her feet with a look of terror.

"The child!" she cried.

"No," he answered quietly, "do not be alarmed;

the boy is safe and well. He was here just now. It has nothing to do with Gascoigne."

Eugénie sat down as suddenly as she had risen, and clasped her hands closely together. Her lips trembled as she said—

"Lionel?"

"Do not be so frightened, Eugénie," pleaded Sir John gently; "indeed there is no need. I have no very bad news to communicate. If I had, I should not keep you in suspense. It is only that the papers speak more seriously than before of affairs in India. More troops are being hurried up country, and there will be fighting soon."

Eugénie sat pale and quiet.

"Lionel's regiment will be sure to be the first to engage."

"Amongst the first, no doubt. His regiment is on the spot now; and will, in all probability, go into action at once."

"And they expect fighting to begin at once?"

"So I gather. We might hear of a battle any day now."

Soldier's daughter and soldier's wife though she was, Eugénie felt her courage all ebbing away at the thought of the awful possibilities before her brave young husband. But she did not give way outwardly, and asked with tolerable calmness—

"I suppose the enemy far outnumbered our men?"

"They always do, you know, out there," answered Sir John encouragingly. "You know one Englishman is worth a dozen natives."

"And they are hurrying up reinforcements," pursued Eugénie. "That means that they want more power

than they have. Will the reinforcements arrive in time? I suppose not. I suppose those who are on the spot will have to bear the brunt of everything? It is always the way."

Sir John had not meant her to leap to this conclusion; but love has a thousand instincts of fear and horror, and has a way of reaching at once a point which would not be mastered so quickly by reason.

"My dearest sister," said Sir John tenderly, "you must try to bear up—try to look at the bright side of things. We cannot deny, in face of facts, that Lionel is in the midst of danger; but then so are thousands of soldiers in every such campaign, who yet come home to their wives and children safe and sound, in God's good time. My dear, believe me, we share your anxieties, we feel for you deeply. But although a dark cloud hangs over us, we know that there is light behind. What a blessed thing it is for us to know that all things are in the Hands of our Heavenly Father. Nothing can happen without His sanction, and when He says 'It is well,' can we, shall we wish to feel that it is ill for us, or for those we love best?"

Eugénie's face was hidden in her hands; she was sobbing tearless sobs, which seemed to shake her whole frame.

"I cannot, cannot feel like that," she gasped. "I am wicked, rebellious, perverse. I do not love God nor trust Him. I feel I should *hate* Him if He took away my husband. Oh, what shall I do? where shall I go? Who will help me to be good? I cannot, cannot love God. How can I, when He is so cruel to me? Oh, what shall I do?"

"You can only go to Christ Jesus," answered Sir

John, rising and laying his hand upon her bowed head. "You can only go to Him with all your sin and all your sorrow. He knows what sorrow is like—ah, how much better than ever we can do! He was the Man of Sorrows. He was acquainted with grief. And He never lays upon one of His erring children one tithe of what He bore for them, nor bids them take up a cross too heavy to be borne. Go to Him with your burden. Take it to the foot of His Cross. He will meet you there. He will understand, without any words of yours, all you would say to Him of your sin, your repentance, your load of grief. Go to Him and prove His love for yourself. No truer words were ever traced than these: 'Whosoever cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out—Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'"

Sir John was gone, and Eugénie was left alone weeping.





CHAPTER XIII.

“MISSING.”

EUGÉNIE sat upon the sun-lit terrace, her face buried in her hands, the hot tears falling through her fingers, and her heart full of bitter feelings of grief and fear. How long she had sat thus she did not know, but she started suddenly to feel a pair of soft arms flung round her neck, whilst her child's face was pressed to hers, and his voice sounded in her ears—

“Mamsey, don't kye—don't kye. Chap loves you. He will be good and take care of you.”

She pressed the boy to her, and her tears fell fast over his clustering curls.

But Gascoigne's caresses and entreaties were not without their effect, and gradually Eugénie grew more calm.

“What's matter, Mamsey?” asked the boy. Then raising a pair of grave dark eyes to his mother's face, “Grandy said, ‘Chap go to his poor mother—poor mother wants him. Chap must be very good, brave boy, and comfort dear mother.’ Am I a good boy?” he concluded suddenly, closing his narrative, and letting his merry smile break over his dimpled face.

"My precious little Gascoigne! What should I do without you?"

"Grandy said, 'Be very good to mother.' I'm going to be good always, now."

"Was it Grandy who sent you just now?" asked Eugénie, the colour mounting slowly in her cheeks.

"Yes; Grandy said, 'Go to poor mother. Poor mother very sorry. Chap must be very good and comfort her.' Chap thinks Grandy was crying too," and Gascoigne's face looked old and wise beyond his years.

A sudden sense of shame smote Eugénie. A sudden impulse came over her to rise and seek Lady Durley, to kneel at her feet and implore a daughter's place in her heart—a daughter's right to love her, and to claim the love and protection which she so sorely needed. In her heart already the wild appeal for help had formed itself—"You have known sorrow and loss. You have borne a widowed lot—teach me how to bear it! Help me—help me, I am so weak!"

Eugénie half rose from her seat. The impulse was strong upon her. Lady Durley had bidden the boy comfort her; those hard-looking eyes had even shed tears. The cold voice had grown gentle, as her own ears had heard. Surely she would not repulse her in such a moment.

Eugénie had made one step forward, when she suddenly stopped short. Recollection swept over her like a cold wave, and the warm impulse died away.

She remembered her own last words to her mother-in-law, and the rebellious feelings that prompted them. She knew that Lady Durley must have been quick to detect the hidden resentment of word and tone, and

her gentleness and kindness only brought a sense of additional shame and self-reproach.

Eugénie sank back in her seat with a weary sigh. She did not in the least understand her mother-in-law's character. She knew that her nature was somewhat hard, somewhat unloving, not easily roused to tenderness, not given to any display of affection—all this she most fully understood. But of the sterling qualities lying beneath this upper crust of pride and of prejudice, Eugénie knew nothing. With the inexperience of youth, she was given to drawing hard and fast lines, seeing people all good or all bad, according to the impression first produced upon her. She knew that Lady Durley had not liked her when first she had appeared upon the scene, and there had as yet been no indication of any change of feeling upon her part.

Already she was shivering at the bare thought of the audacity which had nearly mastered her the minute before.

“Oh, how could I have thought of such a thing, with any one so cold, so hard—and to whom I had just been saying things she would never forgive or forget? Oh no! She was thinking of Lionel's peril, and that made her notice my words less, but she has no thought for me—she will never love me. O Lionel—my own Lionel!”

Eugénie took Gascoigne's hand in hers, and went up to her own rooms. She sent the nurse away, and laid him herself in her own bed.

That was one of the disputed points between herself and Lady Durley, and several small battles had already been fought over it, the victory generally

remaining with the elder woman. Lady Durley insisted that it was far better for the child to sleep in his own nursery crib, whilst Eugénie clung to the idea that he was better and happier with her, because she liked to have him. Facts had a way of proving Lady Durley in the right; but in her present mood of yearning love and deep distress of mind Eugénie was not likely to consider this.

"Gascoigne must pray for father, as he has never prayed before," said Eugénie with trembling lips. "Dear father is in danger. He will have to go out and fight very soon. We must pray that—that—God takes care of him—that nobody—kills him."

Gascoigne's dark eyes were fixed earnestly upon her face. He clasped his hands together, and repeated the words she dictated to him, with an earnestness of comprehension unusual in so young a child. When he had been laid down to sleep, his eyes still continued to gaze out thoughtfully into the room, and his lips kept whispering again and again—

"Please God take care of father, take care of dear father. Bring him safe home again. Don't let anybody kill him. Please God take care of dear father, and everybody, for Christ's sake. Amen."

Eugénie sat and listened to the child's murmured petitions; and her own heart went with them, whilst the words of prayer seemed to die away upon her lips.

"He is more fit to pray than I," she said to herself. "God will surely hear the innocent pleading of a little child. But I, oh how is it I cannot get near to Him? Why will He hide His face from me? I call, but no one answers!"

Eugénie's mind was yet all clouded. Her spirit was wrapped in confusion and doubt.

She was like one groping about in some underground place—seeking wildly and frantically for the light, which she knew was shining without. Now and again a ray had pierced in upon her darkness, and she had believed that the way was plain before her; but then again she had lost sight of the cheering gleam, or it had faded and shown itself but a false light, and the obscurity around became as dense as ever.

Still, if Eugénie was but able to see it, the darkness was not now so black as once it had been. The twilight which precedes the dawn had stolen upon her, and although she knew it not, the clue she so sorely needed was already in her hands.

"At the foot of the Cross," Sir John had said. It was thither he had bidden her go, with her burden of sorrow and sin. But the girl in the bewilderment of grief and anxiety had not grasped the meaning of those beautiful words; and in the night of sorrow which seemed to be closing in upon her, the hopes and helps which she had begun to find in God's Word, and in the words of others, all faded and grew dim.

Is this an uncommon phase with those who are struggling into a new life? Surely not.

To some it seems, indeed, as if the glorious certainty of Redemption through our Saviour's death could be grasped in a moment of time—could be revealed to some hearts by a ray of Divine light, whose glory never fades and is never eclipsed. Some natures are so trusting, so child-like, perhaps even so Christ-like, that the weary battle between doubt and trust, hope and fear, the sense of sin and the certainty of redemp-

tion, has only to be fought out once and for all, and even then faith and hope and love win an easy triumph.

But surely these natures are not common in this sinful world of ours; such victories rare.

How far more often we see the battle being fought out wearily amid many reverses, many losses, many victories of the enemy. It often seems to those who watch the struggle, and those who in after years look back upon their first efforts in throwing off the yoke of sin, that the powers of evil are never more strong, the heart never more weary and "dead," the mind never more clouded and bewildered, than during the first determined struggle after holiness.

In Eugénie's case this was certainly so. Never before had she felt so weary, so worn, so hopeless. It seemed to her that a burden had been laid upon her heavier than she could bear; and she was almost ready to yield herself a prey to numb despair and hopeless indifference as to her own soul.

Almost, but not quite.

These last weeks had not been lived in vain. Her soul had not been stirred by all she had passed through, to sink down without a struggle in apathy and despair. She had seen too many glimpses of light—too much of the silver lining to the cloud—to be able to doubt the existence of the light beyond. She had seen too clearly how other laden souls could lay their burdens down, by turning in prayer to One who never failed to hear and answer, not to greatly long to lay hers down too, and receive the same assurance of pardoning grace and redeeming love. She could not say, "I do not believe that God hears prayer,"

because she had watched beside the bed of one who never failed to receive help and relief, even amid his greatest sufferings, by turning in prayer to the Heavenly Father, who numbereth every hair of His children's heads.

But how to pray—how to make herself heard, and to *feel* that she was heard, Eugénie had still to learn. Her heart seemed dead, her understanding void. The heavens were as brass above her, the earth as iron beneath her. There seemed no way of reaching God. The load of her sorrows weighed her down. She could not shake off the feeling expressed in Naomi's pathetic words, "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." The presentiment of coming ill was so strong upon her, that hopeful trust had no place in her heart. "God is angry with me because I cannot love Him as I ought," was the unspoken thought of her heart, "and now He is going to punish me for it."

This was hardly the spirit in which to seek the peace for which she longed ; but poor Eugénie, in her youth and inexperience, her aspirations after good and her unchecked impulses of pride and rebellion, was hardly yet in the state in which God's message could reach her heart. She wanted God to come to her, she almost resented His "indifference" because He did not ; but she was not yet prepared to go to Him in all humility, and bring to Him that one oblation which He craves, "a broken and a contrite heart."

And that weary day drew to its rest ; and another yet more weary dawned. Heart-sick and miserable, Eugénie waited for tidings, and when the tidings came, she hardly dared to listen to them.

Things looked very dark. Fighting was imminent—

indeed an engagement was hourly expected—and the reinforcements had not yet arrived. The situation was undoubtedly perilous.

Eugénie felt as if she had known this all along—as if the news were no news to her. She felt almost as if it would be a relief to know the worst—for the worst to be over. What is there in the presentiment of ill which makes it almost harder to bear than the ill itself?

News did not reach Linley Castle till the afternoon. A mounted groom was sent down daily in these anxious times to bring up that terrible, dreaded, longed-for paper, as fast as horse-power could carry it.

Eugénie had spent the past two days almost entirely alone with her child. She shrank even from Sir John's tender sympathy, feeling that no other soul could feel one tithe of her misery and despair, and pride and shyness alike held her aloof from Lady Durley, to whom she would fain have turned for the comprehension impossible to one not herself a widow.

Eugénie as yet knew of nothing, save that her husband was in the front ranks of our troops; but already it seemed to her as if her widowhood had begun, as if her white dresses were a mere mockery of unconsciousness of loss.

News reached the Castle about four o'clock in the afternoon, and was waited for with a great and almost feverish impatience.

The paper was brought even earlier than usual on this particular day, for the man had not spared his horse, having heard that there was news of an engagement.

Sir John and Lady Durley were in the study, wait-

ing. Eugénie had not come down yet, but might be expected any moment.

"James heard tell that there has been fighting, sir," said the butler, who handed in the paper, and his face expressed a sympathetic anxiety not to be concealed. For James had heard more than that in reality.

Five or ten minutes later Eugénie entered that room and stood white and mute in the doorway.

Sir John's head was resting upon his crossed arms, which lay upon the table; and Lady Durley sat motionless in her chair, as if turned to stone.

It was several seconds before Eugénie was observed; and it was Lady Durley who saw her first.

"My dear," she said rising hastily, and coming forward with both hands outspread, "come and sit down, and let us tell you the news. There has been an engagement—our troops victorious as usual—"

"Wait one moment, please," interposed Eugénie quietly. "We must attend to John first of all."

She knew what had happened; but she could not bear to hear the fatal words—anything to stave off, even for a moment, the awful certainty.

Sir John had lifted himself up at the sound of his mother's voice, and the ghastly pallor of his face had revealed better than anything else what had happened.

Eugénie procured camphor and held it to his lips, and bathed his forehead with *eau-de-Cologne*. He was subject occasionally to such attacks, and she knew now, as well as his mother, what to do.

Her own face was as white as his; but her hands were steady, and her voice did not tremble when at last she spoke.

"You are better now; but do not try to talk. I understand without any telling."

"My dear," answered Lady Durley very quietly, "it is not quite what you think. God grant it may not come to that; but Lionel's name is amongst the missing."





CHAPTER XIV.

AN INVITATION.

“**M**Y poor darling—my poor, sweet Eugénie! What can I say to comfort you?”

Tears stood in Lucile’s eyes. Her voice shook with feeling. Eugénie, who had remained dry-eyed and stunned ever since the news had come, put her arms about her friend’s neck and burst into tears.

“We saw it yesterday, and I longed to come to you; but I hardly dared so soon. I felt I hardly had the right, for I am only a new friend after all.”

Eugénie clung to her appealingly.

“I have no old friends. Everything seems torn up by the roots. Oh, help me—help me to bear it!”

The same old cry—the same yearning for help to bear a burden which seemed too heavy for her to carry alone—the same wild hope that human love could bring to her peace and strength, and even consolation.

“Poor darling, poor darling!” murmured Lucile tenderly; “would that I could. Would that I could keep you always near me. Dearest Eugénie, you must keep up heart still. Many of the ‘missing’ turn up at last safe and sound.”

“More are never heard of again, or are known to

have perished," answered Eugénie, checking her tears and speaking with forced calmness. Then wringing her hands together, she whispered, more to herself as it seemed than to her companion, "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Lucile's whole soul was moved within her, and went out in pity to the fair young creature before her, so bowed down by the weight of her woe. She had known, in her day, some of the overpowering anxiety and fear which were now weighing down Eugénie, and her heart ached in warmest sympathy.

"I will tell you what you shall do, dearest," she answered quietly. "You shall come home with me. This house is too sad, too lonely for you just now. Sir John is ill with grief; Lady Durley bowed down by a double trouble. It is not well for you to be here. Come home with me, and give to Constance and me the right to comfort you as best we can. It is little indeed, that any one can do; but let us at least try to do that little, Eugénie dearest, let me take you home with me."

"Ah, if you only would!" cried Eugénie pleadingly. "Anything would be better than this!"

Poor child! In the restless misery of her grief it seemed as if any change must be for the best. She felt so lonely, so desolate, so heart-broken. In her present state she was unable to help to nurse Sir John through the attack of illness occasioned by the news of his brother's uncertain fate. All she had done that day was to pace her room in the misery of her soul, and strive after a resignation that she could not feel.

"I will do so gladly, gladly, if you will come," was

Lucile's ready answer. "I should like to take you away out of hand. You are not fit to be alone, and there is nobody here who understands you."

"And Gascoigne?"

"He must come with you, of course. Do you suppose I would part you from your boy? One more will make no difference to my nurses, and my little ones will be delighted to have a playfellow. Let me carry you both off now—at once. You can leave orders with your maid as to the sending off of your things, later on."

"My things!" answered Eugénie, pressing her hand to her head. "I don't know what to say about them. Ought I—ought I not—to wear—black?"

Lucile stopped her with a kiss.

"My dearest child, I cannot allow you to talk so. It is not right, my sweet Eugénie, to despair. I have faith—you must have faith. You are unnerved and unhinged, and no wonder; but do not give way. All may yet be well. I have known escapes and surprises far more wonderful."

Eugénie tried to smile, though her lips trembled.

"When I leave here, I shall be better. Here I feel that they all share my fears. O Lucile! I hope they will let me stay with you. I must go and ask leave. I hope, I *hope* Lady Durley will not object."

Eugénie had never been able to hit upon a more familiar name for her stately mother-in-law.

Lucile's eyebrows lifted themselves slightly.

"Have you to ask leave, dearest? Are you not a free agent here?"

"I suppose I am; but I would rather she gave her assent. In any case I must speak to her. Will you

excuse me if I go now? I think I shall find her alone just at this time."

Eugénie sped away on her mission. It seemed to her as if her great wish in life now was to escape for a time from Linley Castle and its influences.

Lady Durley was easily found, and the request made known to her. To her it sounded very strange and almost unseemly. Here was a young wife, who had but just learnt sad tidings of an absent husband—tidings which might any day resolve themselves into definite news of his death—wishing at such a moment to leave the home her husband had selected for her, under the care of his own nearest of kin, to pay a visit to some newly-made friends, of whose very names she had three months ago been ignorant. The idea seemed to her strange and almost revolting. It offended her taste, her sense of the fitness of things, her ideas as to the proprieties of life. She could not in the least understand such an attitude of mind as Eugénie's, and she felt that a personal slight were being put upon her and her son.

And yet the sight of Eugénie's pale, strained face moved her compassion. She felt a certain love and sympathy for her in this, her first deep grief, and the possibility of a yet darker future made her heart unusually tender.

She would have loved this daughter-in-law of hers if she had understood her better; but a great gulf of reserve and mutual distrust lay between them, which neither had the resolution to bridge as yet.

"You wish to go away at once to visit Mrs. Beauchamp," said Lady Durley slowly; "do you not think it is rather a strange time for such a visit?"

"I want to go—I want to go," pleaded Eugénie. "Ah, do not say I must not."

"My dear, I have no intention of interfering with your movements. All I ask you is, whether you think this visit will not look very strange at such a time? What will the world think of your leaving home at such a time?"

"What does it matter what they think?" cried Eugénie; "let them think what they like. I do not care."

"My dear, such words as those are childish. We must and should care for the good opinion of others. It is important in everything to be careful that our actions be not misconstrued by others. No one can afford to be independent of public opinion—least of all a woman, and a woman whose husband is not on the spot to guide and control her. I merely ask you to consider if this step is advisable. I shall not attempt to combat your decision."

"I want to go," repeated Eugénie. "I have thought of everything. I must go."

"Very well, my dear, you had better give your own orders."

Eugénie stood irresolute.

"Why should I not go?" she questioned. "Why do you want me to stay?"

"I cannot help thinking that home is your right place, all things considered, at the present crisis. But I know people think differently now from what they did in my day. I shall not attempt to dictate to you."

Eugénie still hesitated. Her feelings were at war within her. A little softness and tenderness on Lady

Durley's part would have turned the scale; but the impassive face told no tale, and the girl turned away heartsick and weary.

"I want to go," she said. "I am too miserable to care for appearances. Lucile understands—she knows what it is—nobody else does."

"Very well, my dear," said Lady Durley again, with a little icy chill in her voice, which Eugénie was not slow to detect. "You had better go with your comprehending friend."

As Eugénie retraced her steps to her room she felt a curious sinking at heart. She had won her cause, and yet she felt it had been a barren triumph. She almost wished Lucile had never come. Might not Lady Durley be right? Might it not be looked upon as a slight to her husband's relatives to leave their house at such a time as this?

"My dearest, what has she said to you?" cried Lucile, coming forward and taking her hand. "Has she laid her veto upon the visit?"

"No," answered Eugénie rather wearily, "she has not opposed it; but she does not like it."

"Naturally not."

"Why?"

"She does not like us."

"I do not think that was the reason."

"No? What then?"

"I think she thought it would hardly look right for me to be paying a visit at such a time. Is she right, do you think? Please tell me the truth!" and Eugénie's lip quivered.

"My sweet child, I cannot have you distress yourself by morbid thoughts. Every one will understand

and sympathise. We all know Lady Durley's tender mercies."

"She means to be kind, I am sure," said Eugénie quickly.

"I hope so; but I cannot understand those people who always 'mean to be kind,' and yet are always cold and distant. It is so easy to show feeling where it is genuine," and Lucile laid her cheek against Eugénie's, with a sweet caressing gesture.

And Eugénie was reassured. A warm touch and loving word went very far with her. She gave herself over to Lucile's loving guidance, and let her settle everything.

An hour later and Mrs. Beauchamp's carriage, containing its three occupants, was driving in at the gates of Fontbury Park.

Constance Seymour greeted Eugénie with quiet sympathetic warmth, when she saw who it was that had arrived.

"I have carried her off," announced Lucile triumphantly; "carried her off in the teeth of the enemy's guns. I told you I should if I could, and witness the result. Poor, dear child, she would have pined away in that great, lonely, loveless house. It was too desolate. I shudder to think of it."

"You look very tired," said Constance gently. "Lucile, Mrs. Walter Arbuthnot has been waiting some time to see you. Frank is with her in the small drawing-room."

"Ah, then I must leave Eugénie to you," said Lucile. "Take good care of her, Constance; she is tired to death, poor child, and hardly slept an hour last night, I am sure. Take her to her room, and give her some

tea; and let that dear little man go to the nursery; he will find friends there, who will welcome him gladly."

Lucile tripped away, all smiles and sweetness and sympathy. Somehow (she could not in any way explain the sensation) Eugénie felt a sense of relief at being left alone with quiet Constance.

They ascended the stairs in silence, and it was only when they reached the dainty, flower-scented room, which had already been prepared for a guest, that Constance took her by both hands, saying with peculiar gentle tenderness,

"Dear Eugénie, I have been thinking so very much of you since yesterday."

Eugénie's lip quivered.

"Thank you, thank you," she said. "You do me good, I knew you would."

Little more was said, until the tea Lucile sent up to them had been drunk, and then as the two sat in silence, and near together upon the sofa, Constance asked with tender directness,

"Dear, does it hurt you to talk—or is it a relief?" Eugénie looked at her, and hardly seemed ready with an answer.

"I want so much to know—does it seem more than you can bear?"

"I have not begun to think yet," answered Eugénie quickly. "I dare not. I feel as if I wanted never to think any more."

Her eyes dilated and her chest heaved. Constance felt the hand she held turn cold.

Eugénie," she said gently, "you should not feel like that. It is so much easier to face the trouble, and

learn how to bear it, than to turn away, and refuse to take it up till it is forced upon us."

"I dare not look at it," said Eugénie in a low voice. "I dare not think about it. I could not bear it—I know I could not. I believe I should go mad," and she clasped her hands and wrung them together with a gesture of despair.

"You cannot bear it in your own strength," said Constance. "But you can get help."

"Help?"

"'Cast thy burden upon the Lord; and He shall sustain thee.'"

"Words, words, words! All empty words."

Constance made no immediate reply. She let the silence remain unbroken a long time. By-and-by she began again in her low, clear voice.

"'Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?'

'Come to Me,' saith One, 'and coming,
Be at rest.'

'Hath He marks to lead me to Him
If He be my guide?'

'In His hands and feet are wound-prints
And His side.'

'If I ask Him to receive me
Will He say me nay?'

'Not till earth and not till heaven
Pass away.'

Again there was silence, which this time was broken by Eugénie.

"I cannot understand now," she said, passing her hand wearily across her face. "I think my head and

my heart are both turned to stone, or to ice. Perhaps they will melt some day. Then you shall tell it me all again. I should like to understand. Lionel would understand. He was good—like you. If he dies—if he is dead—and can look into my heart—he will see how wicked it is. I must try to be good—to learn to be good for his sake. He would be so sorry. Ah! What is it? Help me, Constance!—Lionel!—”

And Eugénie, for the first time in her life, fell back in a faint.





CHAPTER XV.

WILLOUGHBY'S PATIENTS.

WHEN Eugénie came to herself, she found herself lying upon the bed, Willoughby Beauchamp holding her hand, and Constance and Lucile standing by. From the look of the evening light she fancied that some time must have passed since she had fallen asleep—for during the first conscious moments she fancied she had just awakened from sleep.

She would have moved and spoken, but a gesture from Willoughby checked her.

"Keep very quiet," he said. "You had better lie still and not talk. You will be better soon."

"What is it?" she asked, "I can't remember."

"I do not want you to remember. I do not want you to think. Lie still and sleep if you can."

Eugénie was very weary. A leaden weight seemed to press upon her eyelids. She closed her eyes gladly. She had no wish to think. She almost wished she could believe that she never should wake to remembrance or thought again.

Willoughby watched till he was satisfied that she slept, and then he left the room, followed by Lucile.

"She will do now; but it was a long faint. She hardly ought to go back to Linley to-day. The move might bring on a return."

Lucile smiled triumphantly.

"There will be no need. She is my guest. Poor child, how glad I am I rescued her before this attack came on! Fancy being left to Lady Durley's tender mercies!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I found her to-day alone in that dismal old castle, eating her heart out for want of a little human sympathy; and I just carried her off in spite of the mother-in-law's opposition. Lady Durley is the kind of woman who, when asked for bread, would give a stone."

"She did oppose the idea?"

"I believe she made herself very disagreeable—it was just what she would do. I am so thankful to have got that poor child out of her clutches."

Willoughby was silent, and his companion gradually became aware of this.

"You look as grave as a judge," smiled Lucile. "What is the matter?"

I am not sure whether Mrs. Durley had not better have remained where she was, all things considered."

"Ah, you cold-hearted men—you uncomprehending, unsympathetic creatures! I can only say, Willoughby, that if you, even you, had found that poor, sweet child as I found her to-day, you would have done just as I did."

"Even I?" and Willoughby began to smile. "Even a hard-hearted monster such as I! Thank you, Lucile. You know how I value your good opinion."

"I know nothing of the kind," was Lucile's quick answer. "I know you criticise me, as nobody else in the world does. I cannot think how it is that I allow it. Tell me, my lord, what I have done wrong now. I cannot imagine."

"Wrong is perhaps too strong a word; but I doubt the wisdom of taking Mrs. Durley away from Linley at such a time as this."

"She was in such trouble."

"Does not trouble sometimes draw people very close together? Lady Durley cannot but feel this uncertainty as to her son's fate. Might not the common bond of sympathy and sorrow draw them together?"

Lucile shook her head with a wise smile.

"You are very clever, Willoughby—in your own way. But there are some things a man never understands. You will never understand Lady Durley, nor for the matter of that, Eugénie either. I do believe the poor child would have been driven almost out of her mind, if she had had no one to turn to for a little love and sympathy. Some outlet was absolutely necessary. She had shed no tears till I came to her. A fainting fit is a simpler matter than a brain fever."

Lucile spoke in perfect good faith, as Willoughby saw.

His judgment was not convinced of the wisdom of her plan, nor even of its ultimate benefit to Eugénie; but he could not doubt his kinswoman's kindness of heart; and he was prepared to admit that, in some cases, feminine instinct was more to be trusted than masculine reason.

"And at least what is done, is done, and we must all make the best of it, and do what we can to cheer and strengthen her for what may be in store."

Lucile put on a half-laughing, half-pouting look.

"You never will give in and say I am right. You are a most uncompromising, disagreeable man." Then her face changed, and she added anxiously, "You fear the worst for Lionel Durley?"

"I am afraid I do. I fear there is little likelihood of his ever being heard of again. In that kind of savage, mountain fighting, many fall, whose bodies are never found. Captain Durley's company suffered severely. I am afraid there is small hope that the leader escaped."

Lucile said no more. She did not want her own faint hopes extinguished. Eugénie had no one else to cheer and comfort her. Constance was more likely to try and brace her up to endurance rather than buoy her up by hope. Lucile felt as if no one but herself understood the feelings of the poor young wife. How should they, she asked herself, when they had never had any similar experience?

Constance came downstairs by-and-by, with the news that Eugénie was still sleeping soundly, and Willoughby gave orders that she was on no account to be disturbed.

"You must stay and dine here, Willoughby," Lucile decreed, "and see her again before you leave. I am not going to have the responsibility all upon my shoulders. If she is going to be ill, you must share it. I am sure it is enough to try anyone's constitution, all that the poor child has gone through since she came."

"Do you think she will be ill, Willoughby?" asked Constance, when they were left alone together, and had turned instinctively into their favourite shady path.

"I hardly think so, physically speaking; but from what I have seen of her, I think her mind may be in a very unsettled and unhappy state for some time to come. She has, I fear, but little 'spiritual stamina' if such a phrase is permissible."

"It is expressive at any rate," answered Constance, "and just describes her state I should say. She seems so tossed about and comfortless. She said very little—but I believe she is too bewildered even to think."

"She had better not try to think yet," said he quickly. "She is not fit for it. If she talks to you of herself, Constance, and her inner life, do not let her mind dwell upon it. Self-analysis is a study which, under many conditions, cannot be undertaken safely, and I am convinced that Mrs. Durley is in no fit state to prosecute it. Take her thoughts away from herself, and her troubles, and even from those subjects which it would seem most natural to discuss at such a time; give her food for thought outside herself, and then, when she has learned to think for others, let her think again of herself."

"I understand you," said Constance gravely. "I am sure you are right."

"I knew you would understand. Do you know I am afraid it was one of Lucile's kindly mistakes to bring her here at all?"

Constance looked up quickly.

"I felt that somehow, though I hardly knew why. What makes you think it?"

"My conviction that Lady Durley has a kinder heart than most people believe. A common sorrow such as this *must*, I think, have drawn those two together, which is all that is wanted to secure the

happiness of that household. As it is, I am afraid her coming here will only widen the breach."

Constance looked grave, and Willoughby presently continued—

"If the worst comes to the worst, and Captain Durley never returns, Linley Castle will, I suppose, become her permanent home. Sir John's life cannot by any possibility be prolonged very much longer. I believe he cannot live much beyond a year at most, and he is aware of this himself, although his mother is not. On his death, the property would pass to the boy, and his mother would be the guardian. Lady Durley has the right to stay in the Castle during her lifetime; but think of the unhappy state of affairs, if the coldness between her and her daughter-in-law be not melted. A desolate young wife, and a heart-broken old mother, living together yet holding aloof—could anything be more sad? I had such hopes that this sorrow would bring them together; and now I fear Lucile's kindness of heart will but serve to drive them farther apart."

"Lucile would be so sorry if she knew."

"Lucile never will know, for she will never believe. She only sees one side of a question, and she neither likes nor understands Lady Durley."

"No, she could hardly perhaps be expected to *like* her," smiled Constance; "but she does not do her justice. I do not think she minds feeling that she has annoyed her, by this carrying off of Eugénie."

Willoughby smiled and sighed.

"Lucile is so kind and good and sincere in her own way of thinking, that one cannot but be fond of her, even when one does not quite approve her actions.

Still in this one case, I do greatly regret the course she has adopted."

After a short silence, he began again upon a fresh topic.

"By-the-by Constance, I have got a new patient."

"Who is that?"

"Old Mr. Mason of the Rookery."

"What old Misanthrope Mason! You don't say so, Willoughby! How very interesting! I thought he never by any chance saw any living soul."

"His house does not look as if it were overrun with visitors, certainly; but he sent for me."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Old age chiefly. He is nearly ninety, you know, not that you would ever think it to hear him talk, or to see him walk. He is a well-preserved specimen, and his highest ambition is to live to be a hundred. I doubt if he will succeed; but he has called me in to try if I cannot assist in the task of keeping off the grim enemy. If he had lived a century or two back, he would have been one of those old magicians, who spent their days in searching after the elixir of life."

"Tell me about him," said Constance eagerly. "I have so often wanted to know. Give me a true and detailed account."

"Well, I was sent for about ten o'clock this morning. That odd-looking old man came for me, in a crazy sort of gig, as he said the summons was very urgent. I went with him at once; but he never spoke a word all the way, and only grunted unintelligibly when I addressed him.

"When we reached the place, you never saw such an odd state as the garden was in, behind those high

brick walls. The paths were so overgrown with weeds that they looked more like rough grass walks than gravel paths; and everywhere a sort of wild luxuriance reigned which was picturesque enough. The garden was one blaze of flowers—flowers growing all anyhow, in the greatest wealth and luxuriance, and looking as though no trouble of any kind was ever expended upon them; and yet one knew that without real care and study such a mass of bloom never could be produced.

"Dogs innumerable ranged about the place, and stared at us with the silence of astonishment, dogs large and dogs small and dogs of every shape and size. Very beautiful creatures most of them were; perfect specimens of their kind, and they had evidently been most carefully trained. Intelligence and confidence was stamped upon their faces.

"More dogs were in the house, and the house was the oddest place I had ever been in. Did you ever hear it described?"

"No, what is it like? I only know that it has a square tower, the one we can see from the hillside."

"It is not really a house at all, in the ordinary acceptation of the term; it is a mere shell, just as the builders left it, bare brick walls within, not a scrap of lath and plaster, paint or paper, in the whole place. Even the staircase has never been made, and a rickety ladder connects the basement with the story above; but nobody ever goes up now, as the floors are growing rotten."

"What an extraordinary establishment! Who form its members?"

"Old Mason and the old man live there alone, with

the dogs. They have no rooms, as we should call them. The door leads into a great square hall—if it deserves the name—and beyond is a large room with a glass roof where the old man paints pictures, and models statues, and does all manner of quaint dabbling in various branches of art. On each side of the entrance hall are two huge bare rooms, containing a few chairs, a table or so, and miscellaneous piles of books. There is no kitchen. The cooking is done ‘anywhere,’ as old Mason informed me, with a smile of contempt at such a trivial question. Some of the rooms have no fireplaces, only hearthstones and chimneys. Some have no doors, although all have windows. To say that there is no order or system of any kind, anywhere, gives but a faint impression of the place. I never saw anything so extraordinary in all my life. The beds are mere pallets, put carelessly up as it seems, in any place most out of the way. All the furniture, pots, pans, books and papers, pictures and statues, lie promiscuously about the place. The house altogether presents an appearance that quite baffles description.”

“And the old man?”

“Ah, he seems quite appropriate to his surroundings, a tall, bent, wizzened old man, with long white hair, and the keenest, darkest pair of eyes I have ever seen. He walks firmly and talks distinctly. He has a thick head of hair, and a fine double row of teeth; and the muscles of his arm are almost as strong as mine. I wondered when I saw him why I had been summoned so urgently.”

“Why had you?”

“I hardly know yet. Of course I am not at liberty

to repeat what passed between us professionally. Until lately he has always felt perfectly well, and has despised doctors heartily; but lately he has had a few warnings, and his great wish to complete his century induced him to condescend to the despised race.

“‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘you must give me ten more years of life, or I’ll not pay you a penny—no cure, no fee. Mind you remember that.’

“I said I would keep it in mind.

“‘Promise me that I shall live to be a hundred. If you won’t do that, I will kick you out of the door, and call in somebody who will.’

“I declined to give him any such assurance. He looked me all over with the most sovereign contempt that I have ever seen on any face; and then he shook his head slowly and compassionately.

“‘What a fool he must be!’ he said quietly. ‘All the pharmacopœia at his fingers’ ends, and he can’t promise a strong, hale man ten little years of life. Didn’t I say all doctors were fools?’”

“But he did not kick you out?”

“No, I answered him back in his own fashion, and that seemed to please him. I did not stay long. He told me plainly he wouldn’t have me ‘fooling round every day and all day long;’ but I was to come regularly to see him once a week; and on his hundredth birthday he would pay my bill. I agreed to this, which pleased him mightily, and we parted on excellent terms, all things considered. I rather enjoyed so new an experience.”

“What an odd old man! Is he very poor, or very rich, do you think? There are so many reports about him.”

“Yes, and I have no idea as to the truth. I dare say he is neither one nor the other, but merely an eccentric old man of limited, though sufficient means. His beginning to build, and then stopping where he did, looks as if he had not great resources.”





CHAPTER XVI.

LUCILE'S COUNSEL.

FOR three or four days Eugénie hardly left her own room, or saw anybody except Lucile and Constance. She was in a quiet, passive state, unwilling to raise herself to think or to face the future, and all about her were most anxious that she should not attempt to do so. She was on the verge of a nervous fever, and perfect rest of body and mind were absolutely essential to her well-being.

Lucile took the case into her own kindly, capable hands, and constituted herself nurse, confidante and friend, to a pre-eminent degree. She performed her offices in so able a manner as to draw down Willoughby's commendations, whilst Eugénie clung to her with an intensity of feeling that was almost exacting, and could hardly bear her friend out of her sight.

Lucile acted very kindly throughout, and made no complaint of the way she was monopolised. She was certainly a model "friend in need," and nothing could exceed her tenderness and consideration for Eugénie.

No more tidings of Lionel's fate reached them. It was said by the members of his company (which had suffered severely) that he must have fallen without

doubt ; but his body had not been found, and no absolute certainty could be established. All who were able to form an opinion, felt convinced that he was dead ; but Eugénie was not told this, and was permitted to cling to the remnant of hope left her by the official word "missing."

What she really did think on this matter nobody knew as yet. She maintained an absolute silence, which no one attempted to break ; and Lucile's idea was that she did not wish to rouse herself even to form an opinion. That she had small hopes of her husband's return was self-evident. She had been weighed down for many weeks by a dread presentiment of evil ; and her very silence upon a subject which must be so very near her heart, was strong evidence that she had tacitly accepted the worst.

Constance saw but little of her during these days of retirement. Constance's time was too fully occupied to leave her the leisure her cousin could command. The children's lessons, Willoughby's patients, and her own studies, gave her but little time to spare, and she fancied that Eugénie was more at ease with Lucile than with herself.

Little Gascoigne interested Constance very much, and he attached himself closely to her after the first day. Like most children who have been brought up without the companionship of small play-fellows, he was backward in some ways and precocious in others. His mind was unusually developed, and his power of reception large. He contrasted favourably and remarkably with Lucile's noisy, merry boys, and showed a marked preference for the girls, tiny Winifred, who could only just toddle alone, and gentle Lily, who

was six years his senior, and a thoughtful child for her years.

Gascoigne and Ross made a great addition to the Beauchamp nursery party, and the little boy found himself both happy and important in his new surroundings. He took a great fancy also to Willoughby, who came daily to the park to see Eugénie. Whenever he could do so, he would slip away from his playfellows to join Constance and Willoughby, and often they would find him, in some mysterious way, at their side, listening with all his ears to what they were saying to one another. It seemed as though the child were beginning to be aware that something was amiss, although his infantile mind could not grasp what the calamity was.

In his mother's room, he showed a gentle quietness remarkable in so young a child, and his caresses were more tender and loving than they had ever been before ; it seemed as if he had grasped the idea that he was now to be his mother's comforter.

Four days had passed by, and then a change seemed to come over Eugénie.

"Lucile," she said, upon the fifth morning, "I think I should like to go out to-day."

"Would you, dearest? Are you sure you feel equal to it?"

"I think so. I am not ill, you know, and this rest has done me good. It has been very nice ; but it cannot last always."

"I will drive you out this afternoon, when the worst of the heat is over."

"Thank you."

"Would you like the boy to come with us?"

"No thank you, I think not. I would rather have only you."

"Very well, dearest. We will drive out alone. I am so glad you feel equal to the exertion. I hope it will do you good."

Lucile was quite aware that some mental change had passed over Eugénie; that a time of awakening had come; and she was therefore prepared for some more searching questions than had as yet been put to her.

Lucile drove her herself that day, without any servant in attendance. The ponies stepped out well, and the soft air fanned Eugénie's face and brought a faint colour into it. For several miles Lucile had all the talking to do, and she kept the conversation in safe channels, and was content that Eugénie's answers should be brief and few.

But after a while, Eugénie seemed to awake from the reverie in which she had sunk. The ponies were ascending a long, easy hill and their pace had diminished. The lane was very quiet, shady and pleasant. Eugénie began to speak.

"Lucile" she said quietly, "you all think that my husband is dead, do you not?"

"My dear child, we cannot tell," answered Lucile earnestly. "Such wonderful escapes do occur from time to time that there is never any reason to give up hope until time has given us reason to do so. Nobody can say that Captain Durley may not return."

"Yes; but, you all think he is dead—I am quite sure you do. I think so myself."

"You must not despair, dear Eugénie—"

"I do not despair, I seem as if I had no feeling left.

I only want to know the truth. Everybody thinks Lionel is dead?"

"We are all very anxious," admitted Lucile.

"I know; and I believe you are more than anxious, I am sure you only tell me to hope, because you want to cheer me. You have no hope yourself."

Lucile hardly knew what to say for the best. Eugénie seemed so calm that it was perhaps only cruel kindness to try and buoy her up with delusive hopes (and delusive she certainly believed them to be) and yet it seemed so hard to admit that in all probability the young girl now at her side was already a widow.

"You are very kind and sweet, Lucile," said Eugénie. "You do all you can to help me and make the truth fall softly. I think it has done so, for I can think about it now, and I only feel numb and cold, not desolate and heart-broken as I ought to be. It is like walking in a dream. I suppose life always will be a dream to me now."

"Poor darling! I wish I could do more for you. My heart aches for you. Let me always be your friend, and help you in your loneliness and sorrow. I think our lives will run somewhat in the same channel, owing to our living so near together. Friendship can do a little—a very little—to make up for a great loss like yours. Let me do as much as I can for you."

"Thank you, dear Lucile," said Eugénie gently, "I know you will always be my best friend."

There was silence a while, and then the same speaker continued quietly,

"Lucile—if Lionel is dead—ought not I to put on black?"

This question was not the one she had meant to ask;

but had been suddenly spoken, as if the doubt had just struck her, as she had opened her lips to frame a different interrogation.

"No, dearest, not yet, you must wait for more certain news. I have been very frank with you. I have not made light of your fears. I have admitted that we share them; but fears do not make certainty. You must not accept a presentiment as a truth. We must hope as long as we can."

"Suspense is almost worse than certainty," said Eugénie softly, "when one has no hope."

"Most likely we shall hear more details soon. The doubt may be set at rest any day."

Eugénie shivered slightly, despite the heat. What would the next news be?

"If Lionel is dead," she began again, taking up the thread of her former line of thought, "what will become of me?"

"What do you mean, dearest?"

"Where shall I go? What shall I do? I have no home, you know."

"The Castle is your home, Eugénie. It will be doubly so now if—if—"

"No," answered Eugénie quickly. "I came here for Lionel's sake. I am not happy, I am not liked, I could not stay if—if—"

"Dearest, what do you mean? Do you not see how important it will be for you to remain where you are? You know your little boy's position now."

"I should not like to reckon on that," answered Eugénie. "Sir John is not an old man. He might live a long while. He might even marry—"

"My dearest child," cried Lucile quickly and un-

guardedly, "Sir John cannot possibly live another year. He has one foot in the grave already."

She regretted the words almost before they had passed her lips. Eugénie turned and looked at her with startled eyes.

"How do you know?"

"Frank told me. I believe it is beginning to be known everywhere. You know his illness is progressive, and he cannot last much longer. I fancied you must have gathered this from himself. He is quite aware how matters stand with him."

Eugénie looked out into space, and said slowly—

"Then I shall be quite alone."

"There is Gascoigne."

"My boy—my poor little orphan boy. Who will help me to make him what he should be?—how can I teach him what I do not know myself?"

"We will all help you, dearest; and you know there will be—well—Lady Durley to go to."

"Lady Durley; Lady Durley!" repeated Eugénie slowly. "I shall not live with Lady Durley. She does not like me. She would not allow it—if John were gone."

Lucile lifted her eyebrows. Was it possible Eugénie still failed to grasp the situation?

"Dearest," she said gently, "do you not know that—that, under the circumstances we have discussed, the property will pass to Gascoigne. If you are his guardian, as I suppose you are, the management will fall upon you during his minority. Lady Durley will have no power, only the right, I believe, to live in the Castle during her life-time."

"I should not like to annoy her," said Eugénie, in

the same quiet way. "I do not think we should like being together. I had better leave the Castle to her, and take Gascoigne away somewhere quite apart. We would leave Linley to Lady Durley so long as she wanted it."

"But you could not do that, Eugénie," said Lucile quickly. "It would not be right to your son. You will have him to think of—his rights and his privileges. It would not be just to him to take him away from his ancestral home. He should be brought up there. Already he is known as the heir. Very soon he may become much more."

Eugénie was bewildered by the prospect opened out. Could it be that Gascoigne would soon be in Sir John's place—Lord of the Manor? It seemed incredible.

"Who would be mistress then?" she asked, "Lady Durley or I?"

"You, of course, Eugénie; and I believe you will have to assert yourself before you will get the upper hand."

"I never could get the 'upper hand' as you call it with Lady Durley. I always feel as if I ought to obey her, whether I do or not."

"Then the sooner you rid yourself of that feeling the better. It will never do. For your child's sake, you must assert yourself."

"The child's sake?"

"Yes, you will have to be brave for him, as well as for yourself. I know what Lady Durley is—a proud, cold woman, bent on ruling. If you do not take care, you will soon become a mere cypher in the house, a mere tool in her hands. She is jealous of you, I believe, and she will humiliate you if she can. Nothing could

be worse for Gascoigne than to see you over-ridden by Lady Durley. If he does not see others submit to your authority, he will be in danger of rebelling himself. Poor child, you are placed—or will be—in a most trying position; but I know you will take up a firm stand, for the boy's sake."

"I will do what I can. I want to do right."

"I am sure of it."

"But I fancied I ought to yield to Lady Durley, to submit to her guidance."

"I don't think so. You are not a child, but a married woman, and you have your dignity to keep up, and your influence to sustain before Gascoigne, who is getting quite old enough to notice things. At present of course Lady Durley is mistress, and has her own position at the head of the household. Still that is no reason why you should submit to her in all things. You must remember that your places may soon be reversed, and you must not learn to succumb to a power which it may soon be your duty to resist."

"I want to do right," said Eugénie again, "and I do get so confused. Right seems wrong, and wrong right. I think what is disagreeable is generally right, and it will be very disagreeable to have any quarrels with Lady Durley."

"You need not quarrel—only stand upon your dignity, and do not be put upon."

"I think she means to be kind."

"So much the better; but you say she does not like you. That is probable enough. They say she never cared for your husband."

"Did not care for Lionel!"

"So they say. I do not know. However, dear, we

have nothing to do with that. You have just now got to think how to act for the best for the sake of the child."

Eugénie said dreamily—

"I wonder if Constance would say what you do."

"Probably not," answered Lucile with a light laugh, "for sensible people, Constance and Willoughby are the two most unpractical beings in the world. I venture, on some points, to think I know better than they! Unworldly dreamers are not always the safest of counsellors."





CHAPTER XVII.

SIR JOHN'S HOPE.

SIR JOHN DURLEY had been very sorry when he heard of Eugénie's departure. He had hoped, like Willoughby Beauchamp, that a common sorrow might draw his mother and his brother's wife nearer together; but now that Eugénie had gone to her friends to be comforted, it was hardly likely this would be the case.

Lady Durley, he could see, was both pained and vexed at the sudden move made by her daughter-in-law. It was she who communicated the news to him, when he awoke from a troubled sleep, to find that Eugénie had gone, leaving for him only a message of farewell.

Physically speaking, Sir John awoke strengthened and refreshed; but he was troubled in mind by what he heard. He thought Eugénie had made a mistake in leaving home at such a time, and he felt that by so doing, she had tacitly accepted the fact that her husband's mother was no friend to her.

He was fond of her too, and fond of the child, and their presence had been a great pleasure to him since his first reserve had worn off.

He and his mother dined alone together, the first time for many weeks, and the meal passed over somewhat heavily. The afternoon papers had brought them no good tidings. It was evident that all believed that Captain Lionel Durley had fallen in the fight. Neither Sir John nor his mother dared to hope that they would ever see him again.

To Lady Durley this blow was a heavier one than she had believed it could be. She was not a woman of much outward tenderness, and Lionel had not been a favoured son. She had seen but little of him since his early childhood, and his marriage had made a distinct breach between them. Still he was her son. There was no getting over that fact, and now that it seemed as if he had perished at his post, though an uncertainty still hung painfully over his fate, it seemed to her as if she had never loved him enough, or could do enough for the seeming indifference which she had evinced toward him and his.

Now that it was too late, she felt that she would gladly sacrifice all her pride and all her prejudice to have her son once more at her side, to tell him how she had really loved him, despite all her past coldness and reserve.

Why everybody gave up hope of Lionel's return it might be hard to define, but certainly the reports that reached them from the front were sufficiently discouraging; and it was felt that certainty would be a great relief. The right to mourn their loss was denied them, and yet they could not honestly indulge the hope that Lionel was spared.

"It looks strange and sad without Eugénie," said Sir John, as he joined his mother in the drawing-room

after a brief interval. "Poor child, I wish she could have made herself happy with us."

"So do I. Her place is certainly here."

"Ah yes; but you know she is young, she does not see things as we do, and then the restlessness of grief was upon her. You see we are old people, you and I, mother," and his smile was curiously gentle and reflective. "It is natural she should turn for sympathy to those who are nearer her in age, and perhaps in feeling."

"I cannot see how strangers can give her a fuller sympathy than Lionel's mother or brother," said Lady Durley, gravely yet not severely.

"Poor child, poor child," murmured Sir John softly.

"I am afraid she is in a very unhappy state."

"John," said Lady Durley, with a certain abruptness of manner most unusual with her, "I believe you think I have no love for Eugénie—that I feel hardly towards her. I did so at one time, I confess; but I have learned to think differently now. You know I am not like some women. It is difficult for me to show what I feel, even when I wish; but I do love that poor child, and if she would let me, I would be a good mother to her. Now that Lionel—is—is—now that we may never see Lionel again, I would do anything for his wife and child. The boy understands—children always do understand by instinct; but Eugénie has not forgiven my annoyance at Lionel's marriage. Sometimes I think she never will forgive."

Sir John's face had lighted with pleasure at hearing these words. He answered eagerly,—

"I am sure Eugénie is not unforgiving. She is shy and reserved, and has been very unhappy and troubled in mind, but I am sure **her** nature is very loving; and

your love would be her greatest comfort—of that I am convinced.”

“Unhappy — troubled in mind,” repeated Lady Durley. “Do you mean before this — this great trouble?”

“I think she has never been really happy at Linley Castle.”

“And you think that I am in fault for that?”

“My dearest mother, no,” answered Sir John earnestly. “Do you think I could make such an accusation as that, knowing you as I do? No. Eugénie’s trouble comes from a deeper source. Her house has been built upon the sand,” he continued after a short pause, speaking in his dreamy, reflective way—“the sand of a human love. Her husband has been to her all in all. When she was separated from him, the foundations of her happiness were rudely shaken—now I fear the whole fabric is crumbling away. The firm, warm sand she trusted to uphold her, is changing to quicksand, which will engulf everything she trusts to its keeping. Homeless and hopeless and heart-broken she needs must be, until she finds the Rock on which to build up the shattered fragments of her life; and then, when once she begins to build on that foundation, she will find that what once was a narrow, gloomy dwelling-place, now becomes a palace of light—that peace and joy and love are its inmates, and that no shock of earthquake or tempest can overthrow or destroy it.”

There was a long silence between mother and son, which Lady Durley was the first to break.

“John,” she said, and it seemed almost as if the tears stood in her eyes, “these things are more of a living reality to you than to me. God knows I have

tried to do Him service ; but how often have I failed—how often—how often.”

“ We all like sheep have gone astray—turned every one to his own way,” murmured Sir John quietly. “ Ah yes, those words are true, so true ! ‘ Altogether become unprofitable.’ Not you more than others—we are all alike in that. If God were careful to mark what was done amiss, which of us could stand ? Thank God, it is not so. He does not love to reckon up our misdeeds. He loves to blot them out. ‘ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.’ We have an Advocate with God—even Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Lady Durley was silent awhile. Then she said, “ You are nearer the Kingdom of Heaven than I, John.”

He looked half-pained as he answered,

“ Do not say that, mother.” Then a wonderfully sweet smile broke over his face, and he added, “ Nearer my journey’s end perhaps ; but the Kingdom of Heaven is round us, all alike, if we can but see it.”

“ Don’t, John,” said Lady Durley quickly.

He looked at her more than once, as if he had something on his mind that he wished to say, and did not know how to word. He looked up more than once, as if he would have spoken ; but the expression of his mother’s face deterred him, and he kept his thoughts to himself.

The next words related to the old subject.

“ Then when Eugénie comes back to us, mother, you will receive her as a daughter.”

“ I will, if she will let me.”

“ Poor child, I am sure she will be only too glad. I

know she craves a love and guidance which only a husband or a mother can give. Take the place of mother, in your own quiet, undemonstrative way, and you will see how gladly she will grow to be a daughter. She is so young, so inexperienced, so unsettled in all her feelings and views of life. It will be everything to have some strong, loving hand to lean upon, someone to guide, control and encourage her. Dearest mother, you will find such comfort and happiness in a daughter's love and care, that it will almost make up to you for—for—*for Lionel.*” But the sentence had concluded so suddenly, that Sir John wondered if his mother guessed he had meant to end it differently.

Sir John was building his own castle in the air. He was planning how a new love, a daughter's love, should bring to his mother's heart a sense of solace in the hour of her need—when she found herself, in her old age, widowed and childless.

The baronet knew that he himself had not long to live. He entertained but small hopes of his brother's return, but he centred his hopes in Eugénie. His mother loved her already, although he knew she had never seen the gentlest, tenderest side of her nature. When she knew her better, love would increase. Mother and daughter-in-law, like Naomi and Ruth, would become all in all to one another, and the child would be at once their comfort and support.

Sir John's only real trouble in the knowledge of approaching death, was the sorrow it would bring his mother, the sense of loneliness and desolation that must fall upon her. Now that Lionel was dead too, in all probability, this desolation would be greater than ever; and to Eugénie he looked as the one being who

could cheer and comfort his mother, when she should be left alone in her sorrow. He would have given much to have had Eugénie with them then.

The news that she had been taken ill at Fontbury Park brought with it an added sense of uneasiness. Eugénie was evidently feeling her sorrow very acutely. How could she do otherwise? And she ought to be at home with her own people, instead of going to comparative strangers for consolation. Lady Durley, in her slowly-awakened love, and her instincts of family reserve and dignity, suffered a good deal in mind from the idea that her daughter-in-law was an inmate of Mrs. Beauchamp's house.

When a week had passed, she said to Sir John,

"Eugénie says nothing in her notes about coming home. Had I not better go and see her, and try if I cannot persuade her to do so?"

"It would be very nice to have her back," answered Sir John, who had sadly missed Eugénie's visits to his study. "I believe the poor child will be happier with us, if she could once make up her mind to face the sad associations of Linley Castle."

"You think the associations trouble her?"

"Yes. I think the place where we hear bad news does grow distasteful and dreaded for a time; but the feeling passes away. I hope Eugénie will come back to us."

Lady Durley drove that same day to Fontbury Park. She would much have liked to see Eugénie alone, but courtesy compelled her to ask for Mrs. Beauchamp as well, and she was sorry to find that both were at home.

She had not many minutes to wait in the drawing-room; but even in those few minutes she had taken

in a good many impressions. The room was utterly different from any of the stately suite of apartments which made the reception-rooms at the Castle. These last were rich and handsome and formal—unchanged from generation to generation, more like the show rooms of some nobleman's house than those where people lived and worked.

Lucile's drawing-room was full of flowers, rich with costly draperies of strange hue and texture, the walls adorned with rare china, everything quaint and yet singularly harmonious as a whole, and restful to the eye. The chairs were luxurious, no two alike, the rugs, which took the place of carpet, were soft to the foot and rich to the eye. It was a typical "high art" room, and indicated much culture and refinement of taste ; and yet Lady Durley did not like, although she could not but admire, what she saw. She wondered what contrasts Eugénie drew between her drawing-room and Lucile's.

The door opened and admitted Mrs. Beauchamp and Mrs. Durley. Eugénie was very pale, and she was dressed in a long clinging dress of plain black—not mourning, only black ; but it looked a startling contrast from the whites and pale delicate tints of colour, which had been her invariable wear before.

Lucile greeted Lady Durley with graceful cordiality, covered Eugénie's silence and evident constraint by her pleasant ease of manner, and did all the talking for the three. She told how poorly the dear child had been, but that she was growing stronger again by slow degrees, and would be almost off the sick list in a day or two. She laid stress upon the good the children were doing both to her and to "sweet

little Gascoigne," and ended by thanking Lady Durley for her goodness in sparing Eugénie, as it was "such a pleasure to them all to have her."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Beauchamp," answered Lady Durley somewhat stiffly. Eugénie had given her one kiss on her entrance, but was now sitting beside Lucile, her eyes bent upon the carpet. "I am very much obliged to you for your kindness to Eugénie; but I am hoping to welcome her home again now. Are you ready to come back to us, my dear?"

Eugénie lifted her eyes, and as suddenly dropped them again.

"I do not know," she answered wearily.

"I think, my dear, your place is at home just now." Lady Durley tried to speak kindly; but Lucile's presence acted like a freezing mixture, and she could hear herself how cold and hard was her voice.

"I am afraid we are sadly selfish, Lady Durley," said Lucile sweetly, "but we are hardly prepared to spare dear Eugénie yet. I really think the change and variety are doing her good. It would be such a pity to lose the ground she has gained."

She took Eugénie's hand and pressed it as she spoke. The difference between the stiffness of one woman and the caressing ease of the other was very marked.

"Sir John and I are anxious to have her at home. I think her place is at home; but I know my views may not be accepted in all quarters. Eugénie, what do you say?"

"How is Sir John?" asked Eugénie, after several seconds of silence.

“As well as can be expected.”

“Better than when I left?”

“Yes, decidedly better.”

Eugénie for once wished that Lucile were somewhere else—she would have so much liked to see Lady Durley alone, to have heard her speak without any third person to come between them. She would have told her mother-in-law, had they been alone together, a little of the trouble in her heart. Perhaps even that cold, hard woman could thaw sometimes, and show some little love; but not in the presence of anyone she liked so little as Lucile. Dear, kind Lucile! How could anybody dislike her! This was the thought that rose by sequence after the other, and her gratitude and affection took up arms against a sense of filial duty.

And then there was Lucile's warning to be remembered. Was this visit the beginning of that attempt to gain the upper hand, which would end in the subjection of herself and her child? Could it be true that Lady Durley had never really loved Lionel? Was it not only too probable, seeing that she found it so hard to forgive his marriage?

Loyalty and love to her husband rose up within her, and her heart was hardened against her mother-in-law. If Sir John had been ill and suffering and had wanted her, she would have gone back, and been almost glad to do so; but if it was only Lady Durley's prejudices that were to be gratified, she would not yield.

“I think, as Lucile is so very kind, I should like to stay here a little longer.”

Lady Durley acquiesced quietly, and as soon as the

words had passed her lips, Eugénie regretted them, and wished she had decided differently. She did not know how to act for the best—she was like a vessel tossed about without rudder or compass—almost hopeless of reaching the haven where she would be.

Her instincts told her to go home, and take up her place there in all meekness and humility ; but pride, and what she called “reason,” bid her hold herself aloof, and not allow herself to be dictated to by others.

“I can see it all,” said Lady Durley to her son. “I did not gain her confidence when first she came ; and now she will never give it. Those who do not like me will teach her the same feeling. Eugénie will never be a daughter to me.”





CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE ROOKERY.

CONSTANCE, you out here this hot day! Wherever have you been?"

"Oh, Willoughby, is that you? Can you give me a lift? I am so hot and tired."

"To be sure, I'll drive you home. You should not walk across the moor in weather like this. It is too much for you."

"It was a cloudy morning, and I thought the day would be cool. It is such a long while since I got to see my old people in the Moor End cottages. I am glad to meet you, however. I was wondering how I ever should get home in this heat and glare."

She was seated now beside Willoughby, in his dog-cart, and the breeze fanned her flushed face refreshingly.

"Are you going straight back to Fontbury? If not, do not put yourself out for me. I will walk from the nearest point. It is only this white chalk road that is so very trying."

"I shall drive you home," repeated Willoughby with his firm smile. "You have walked quite far enough to-day."

"I shall be very glad to be driven," she answered, "if I am not putting you to inconvenience."

"I have only one more call to make, and that is on old Mason. You can sit in the cart, whilst I go in."

Constance smiled and looked interested.

"Will he not resent it, if I do? Or perhaps you leave the cart outside?"

"No, I drive up to the door. It is no business of his, if I happen to have a lady with me. I have no fear of his resentment."

"I should like to say I had really been inside those gates," remarked Constance. "I have always felt a sort of curiosity about that lonely old man, ever since I came. What an odd life he must lead!"

"Very; but it seems to suit him. He is not at all unhappy—not at all the typical old miser recluse, all rags and dirt, and miserable distrust. Old Mason has a distinct sense of humour, and his dogs are to him the equivalent of relatives and friends."

"You have seen him again?"

"Yes, once. So long as I wait for my money, he does not object to a professional visit. I can't help fancying he has taken a sort of liking to me."

"Do you think he will live to be a hundred?"

"I think he might. He is wonderfully hale and strong, despite some of the weaknesses of age, which are beginning to overtake him. I may be able to give him advice on some points that will add to his chances. He is ready to admit as much already. Curious thing that tenacity of life. One would think that after ninety years, one would be glad to lay the burden down."

"Yes," answered Constance thoughtfully. "I think no one who had not lived shut up alone, away from all

the battles and struggles of life, could ever wish for that—a hundred years! Just think what that means!”

“A hundred years to give account of,” mused Willoughby half aloud. “A great responsibility certainly.”

“And here is the place itself,” said Constance after a pause. “Ah, what a wilderness! And yet how beautiful too! You described it well, Willoughby. It is certainly a cultivated wilderness. I should like to ramble about these quaint dark shrubberies and luxuriant gardens. I believe there are seven acres of ground within these high walls. Ah, and there are the dogs. What beauties, to be sure! How many does he keep?”

“Between twenty and thirty I believe—a good big family. And here you see is the house; but you can form no idea of its extraordinary appearance from the outside.”

Willoughby rang at the rusty bell, and was presently admitted within the unpainted door. Constance sat and looked about her.

One or two dogs came up to look at her, their brown eyes expressing no little surprise at such an intrusion. She spoke kindly to them, and a Skye terrier leaped up upon her lap, and a bloodhound reared himself up to be caressed, and to lick the hand that patted his silky head. Evidently the dogs were sociable, whatever the master might be.

“Humph!” snorted a gruff voice at her side, “and who may you be, pray? And what may you be doing here—making love to my dogs? They’ll tear you in pieces at a word from me!”

Constance looked round quickly, and saw before her the tall, stooping figure of a thin old man, with white hair, and very dark, keen eyes, which were fastened

upon her with a curious intensity. He did not look so very old, although his face was white as wax, and seamed all over with the finest network of wrinkles.

His voice at any rate was strong and expressive, and he stuck out his under lip and scowled after he had put his next question.

"Didn't you see my notice up at the gate 'All trespassers will be prosecuted'?"

"I'm not a trespasser," answered Constance with spirit. "You couldn't prosecute me if you tried ever so much."

"I couldn't, couldn't I? We'll see about that. What is your business here then, may I ask, madam?"

"My business is to wait until you have seen your doctor, and then drive home with him. Dr. Beauchamp is my cousin, and he has kindly given me a lift this hot day."

"Humph!" growled the old man again. "So that puppy is your cousin, is he? How do you make that out, pray? I don't see it."

Constance gave him a quick glance, wondering if his words were merely spoken by chance, or if he knew more than appeared.

"My second cousin, to be accurate," she answered, "and his brother married my first cousin, and we have known each other well all our lives. I consider that I have a right to call him cousin."

"Ah," said old Mason, drawing his brows together, "and you, I suppose, are the young lady who is so popular in the back slums of Fontbury? Why don't you wear a poke bonnet or a hideous cloak, and make yourself fashionably ridiculous, like other young ladies who think they have found a 'vocation'? You ought to know better than to go about decently dressed."

Constance looked at him searchingly. She could not in the least tell whether he spoke in jest or in earnest. She was not sure that she liked the tone of his remarks, though the satire did not seem to be levelled at herself.

"I do not think you can know very much about the 'back slums' of Fontbury yourself, Mr. Mason," she answered gravely. "If you did, you would not care to speak slightly of any who helped to lighten the burden of the sick and poor, whatever dress they elected to wear."

"Hoity-toity! Are you going to lecture me, young lady, and in my own house too! A pretty pass things are coming to! It's well I live out of the world. In my days boys and girls were seen and not heard—all that has changed now, I suppose."

"If you were never heard when you were a boy, Mr. Mason, they certainly have."

He looked very hard at her with his keen, dark eyes. Constance returned the glance with equal steadiness.

"I don't believe she's afraid of me," remarked the old man at last.

"Not in the least."

He nodded his head several times, and then shook it as emphatically.

"I don't know what the world is coming to."

Constance laughed suddenly, and descended from her seat in the cart.

"Mr. Mason," she said, "I am going to be bolder still. Will you let me walk round your lovely garden, whilst you go and see your doctor? I see such curious lovely flowers. I should so like to get a nearer view of them."

"She wants to go round my garden!" remarked

Mr. Mason with an air of hopeless bewilderment. "Well, I wonder what next."

"You may come and see ours next," answered Constance. "It is pretty in its way, though not a bit like this. Lucile would be delighted, I am sure."

There was no time for a reply, as Willoughby at this moment appeared from the house.

"I cannot find my patient," he said, and then stopped and added, "Ah, you are here, sir, I thought you must be outside. Shall we go indoors together?"

"No; I don't want you to-day. I haven't anything to say, and I'm not in the humour to listen to doctors' nonsense. What possessed you to bring Miss Seymour with you?" ("How does he know my name?" thought Constance.) "You know I hate women. I never will have one about the place. I can't think how you dared defy me. I'm not used to it, and what is more, I'll not stand it. Women indeed!"

He glared at Constance from under his bushy brows, but there was an odd sort of involuntary twinkle in his eye that was not lost upon her.

"Will you show me your garden, Mr. Mason?" she asked imperturbably. "I am sure you must be proud of your plants. They could never look as they do if they were not well cared for. How do you manage to do so much with so little help?"

"When I was young, it was the fashion to work and not to play," growled the old man. "We weren't ashamed to use our own limbs."

He had moved onwards as he spoke, and without having assented to Constance's request, he began to comply with it in a grumbling, ungracious way which

concealed some little pride and eagerness in the display of his horticultural curiosities.

The girl's interest was very great. Much that she saw was new and strange, for the old man had given up the best years of his long life to the practical study of plants. He had tried innumerable experiments, and had produced many curious and unexpected results. Constance and Willoughby understood enough of the subject to be much struck by what they saw, and to show an intelligent comprehension that could not but be gratifying to their host.

Old Mason, however, did not betray any of this feeling. He was gruff and short throughout, in his manner, and even the flowers he gave to Constance, from time to time, were most ungraciously presented. It seemed as though he could not get over the astonishment he felt at his own proceedings. The idea that he should be showing anybody, especially a woman, his favourite flowers, caused him an evident sensation of extreme surprise and perplexity, which at times became positively ludicrous.

Time pressed at length, and Willoughby said they must be getting on.

"I am so very much obliged, Mr. Mason, for all you have shown us," said Constance.

"All!" he retorted with a contemptuous snort.

"Why, you have not seen half yet!"

She looked at him with a bright smile.

"I should be so pleased to come another day and see the rest."

"It's like your impudence to say so."

"You see you put a premium on impudence, Mr. Mason. If I had not shown any to-day, I should never have seen your flowers."

He stuck out his under lip and grunted, without making any response. When they drew near to the dog-cart he said, turning suddenly round,

"I can't have you coming here alone, mind you. I'd rather have a pair to deal with than one."

Constance repressed an inclination to smile.

"I will keep it in mind," she said.

"Next week my ixias will be out," he said; "do you know what ixias are? If you do, I know you never saw any like mine. I've made a climate in a corner there, just to suit them."

"I once saw some beauties in Guernsey; but we have never been able to grow them here."

"I don't suppose you have—gardeners and women—all fools together. You needn't laugh," he added turning upon Willoughby suddenly, "doctors are the biggest fools in creation."

After that he said no more, until they were just preparing to drive away, when he looked at Constance and said,—

"Mind, I won't have you come alone. I'll set the dogs on you if you dare try. Two women are better than one—they'll play the Kilkenny cats for one another. I've a heap of pictures and houses and miniatures in there," waving his hand towards the house. "But I don't suppose *you've* the brains to appreciate art."

They drove off, and Constance said,—

"What a very odd old man, Willoughby; but I don't understand him. He is not really a bit unsociable. He quite likes to talk and to show his things. How is it that he has never made any friends, and that he lives all alone shut up there?"

"I can't tell. He is a puzzle to me; for, as you say, he is not really so unsociable. What the reason can be, I cannot imagine; but he seems to take an odd interest in our family. He knows all about us in fact, and everything we have done since we came here. So far as I can make out, this interest extends to nobody else in the place; and I am utterly at a loss to guess its origin."

"Was that why you took me in this morning?"

"Partly, I wanted to verify my suspicions, and certainly I have done so. He would never have allowed a casual stranger to admire his flowers, and he has almost sent an invitation to Lucile. Some special interest in us he certainly must have; but what its nature can be I cannot imagine. Last time I was there, he made me talk of ourselves, and showed by his questions that he knew a great deal about us. It is hardly 'canny' indeed, all that he does know, and he most certainly could not have picked up so much information without a special effort. It seems to me as though his chief motive in calling me in was to see me and learn more about us. I begin to fancy that his fears for his health, and his desire to live to be a hundred, are rather the blind under which he conceals his real motive in sending for me. I cannot see that his health is any worse than it has been for years, according to his own account."

"It is very strange," said Constance.

"Yes. He is very old indeed—a contemporary of our great, great grandparents I suppose. I wonder if he knew some of our ancestors in by-gone days. I don't think I remember the name of Mason anywhere in our family. Do you? Frank has a pedigree, has he not?"

"Yes; but I never heard of any Masons. We can

look when we get back ; but I cannot fancy there can be any reason of that kind."

They did look when they reached Fontbury Park ; but no Mason was to be found upon the family tree. Lucile smiled in some scorn at the idea of supposing the old misanthrope could venture to claim kindred with them.





CHAPTER XIX.

LILY'S LESSON.

IT was Sunday afternoon, a warm sweet day, not oppressively hot, as its predecessors had been, but full of scent, and freshness, and beauty; a day that made life a pleasure, and brought a sense of restful peace to even the saddest heart.

Eugénie was alone in the gardens of Fontbury Park. Lucile and Constance had gone to their Sunday School classes, and would not be back for a couple of hours; but for a wonder their guest did not feel any aversion to being alone.

Eugénie wanted to think. At last she had reached the stage where she wished to look steadily into the future, and face her position in life.

She was a widow—a widow at two-and-twenty. Of that there could be no doubt. No absolutely certain tidings of her husband's death had reached her—she could find it in her heart to wish for certainty, even the worst—but no hopes were entertained of his escape in any quarters; and the papers had more than once distinctly stated that no real doubt existed as to the fate of Captain Durley. It was a moral certainty that he had perished in the first engagement.

Eugénie did not fight against her convictions. She accepted her fate quietly, and with apparent resignation. The certainty that her husband was dead had not come all at once. The blow had been to a certain extent broken, and although she had never had any real hope after the first shock of ill news, that shock had not been quite so severe as it would have been, if she had heard at once that he had actually fallen in fight.

But doubt was practically at an end now. She had been allowed to order her mourning, and even little Gascoigne began to understand, in his baby fashion, that some sorrow had overtaken him.

As Eugénie sat in her sheltered corner, this quiet Sunday afternoon, she heard the sound of approaching voices—children's voices, which she quickly recognised as her own boy's and Lily's.

Lily was Lucile's eldest child—a thoughtful girl of ten years old, to whom Gascoigne had taken an unaccountable fancy. They were walking hand in hand, down a neighbouring path, and although quite close to Eugénie, they could not see her, nor she them, owing to the thick laurel hedge which lay between them. Their voices, however, were distinctly audible.

"Hear Chap say his lesson," said Gascoigne's voice. "Let's sit down here. It's nice and comfy in the shade. *Think* Chap knows his lesson very nicely."

There was a sound of rustling leaves as the children took their seats, and then the little voice began again—

"Just as I am—without one plea,
'But that Thy Blood was shed for me,
'And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
'O Lamb of God, I come.'"

Sudden tears sprang to Eugénie's eyes, and were not wiped away, for she was hardly conscious of them. Only a moment before the old question was haunting her, the old trouble perplexing her—"I want to be good—I want to do right. What can I do? Where can I go to learn? Who can help and teach me?" Was this an answer? "Just as I am . . . Thy Blood was shed for me . . . O Lamb of God, I come."

Eugénie's hands clasped themselves closely together. A strange sense of tremulous joy and awe seemed slowly breaking in upon her. Could it be that she was going to find what she had so long been seeking? But Lily was speaking, and she held her breath to listen.

"Do you understand what it means, Gascoigne?"

"Not 'xactly."

"It's about Jesus, you know—about going to Him to get forgiven, when we've been naughty."

"Has I been naughty?" asked Gascoigne.

"I think we're all naughty very often," answered Lily thoughtfully. "Aunt Constance says so, though I don't see how she *can* be. I don't think we can quite understand about that till we get big. But Jesus understands, you know. That's why He died. If He hadn't, we couldn't have got forgiven; but now we always can, if we go to Him."

"Isn't He angry if we go naughty?" asked Gascoigne's voice, full of interest; "doesn't He send people away to get gooder first?"

"No, He never sends anybody away, I know," answered Lily with emphasis, "He always wants them to come. I don't know if I quite understand, but I think it's like this. People don't go to Him unless

they're sorry ; and if they are sorry, He is glad, and He takes away their sins and helps them to be good. I don't think people *can* get good before they go to Him. I don't think they can do it alone. You see what it says, 'Just as I *am*—' not what I should like to be—'without one plea.' I think that means without any right to go, except because 'Thy blood was shed for me.' That is Jesus, you know, when He died on the cross ; because He died for everybody. 'And that Thou bidst me come to Thee.' You see He does want us to come to Him : bid means tells us to, you know, so that we needn't be afraid to go. I should think He likes to hear people say, 'O Lamb of God, I come.' You know Jesus is called the Lamb of God."

It may be doubted if Gascoigne quite followed this explanation, although somebody else did, with a strange sense of longing and relief. Lily was very much in earnest, as she always was upon any devotional theme. Gascoigne seemed to catch the mood from her. He nestled up more closely to her, and asked in a very low voice,

"Lily, Is father—dead?"

"I think so, Gascoigne dear. I don't quite know : but I think so. Who told you?"

But this question was not answered ; another was asked instead.

"Lily, what is it?—being dead?"

"When people die, it means that Jesus takes them to live with Him."

"Is that all?"

"I think so. The angels come and take them to Jesus, and they are quite happy with Him. Only we don't see them any more till we die too."

Gascoigne drew a long breath as of relief.

"Don't mind now," he said.

"Did you mind before, dear? Did you think something dreadful had happened?"

Gascoigne seemed to begin to cry,—his next words were not audible, coming as they did between gasps and sobs. Lily was playing the part of comforter.

"Don't cry, Gascoigne dear, indeed it isn't dark and dreadful—people don't understand when they talk like that. Heaven is a beautiful place, and Jesus is always there. I don't know why people cry when other people go to Heaven. I should like us all to die together, and go there straight. I suppose it is because we don't see people any more when they die—not till we die too—that it seems sad."

"Won't Mamsey—nor Chap—never see father—no more?" sobbed Gascoigne.

"Oh yes, by-and-by," answered Lily gladly. "By-and-by Jesus will call you and Mamsey to His beautiful Home, and you will find father waiting there, and it will all be so nice. Only you must try and be good, and be a comfort to dear Mamsey now, because she is very sorry, and misses father so much."

"I'll take care of her," announced Gascoigne boldly. "I loves my Mamsey. I'll take care of her always, and be good always. Perhaps father will see and be pleased. He said Chap was to take care of her and be good. Let's go and find her now. Want to tell her. Don't want her to kye any more."

The children rose to carry out this plan, and Eugénie wiped her eyes, and prepared to receive them with smiles. She had been much moved by what she had heard, but at the same time strangely comforted too.

It seemed as if these childish words of Lily's had gone home to her heart more truly than anything else she had heard.

Some old, forgotten verse, which once she had known but never understood, now recurred to her mind—

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise."

"Mamsey! Mamsey!" cried a little broken voice. "Mamsey isn't to kye any more. Chap is going to take care of his dear Mamsey always. By-and-by we'll just go to father up in Heaven. Lily says so. Lily says Jesus will let us. Me going to be very good boy always."

Gascoigne's arms were clasped about his mother's neck. His warm, soft cheek was laid against hers. Eugénie felt that the dark cloud of despair and depression, which had so long overshadowed her, had been suddenly rent in twain, and a gleam of sunlight allowed to penetrate.

Lily was standing beside her, grave and gentle and thoughtful, guarding, as it were, Gascoigne's words, lest they should hurt his mother.

"We were talking about our Sunday lessons," she explained. "Aunt Constance will come and hear them by-and-by. Gascoigne was saying his to me. He knows it very nicely. It is, 'Just as I am' you know, and he wanted to know how people could go to Jesus. I was trying to explain. He wants to be good, and to go to Heaven by-and-by. You know"—here came a little hesitation—"we shall see people in Heaven, who have got there first. It will be so nice."

"See father," whispered Gascoigne, his face still pressed against his mother's.

Eugénie looked at Lily, smiling through her tears.

"Will you sit down and talk to me, dear? When I was a little girl I had nobody to teach me Sunday lessons, as Aunt Constance teaches you. Will you tell me about yours, what you learn?"

"We learn out of the Bible," answered Lily, seating herself, and opening the little volume in her hand. "The boys have a piece explained to them, and then they learn it for next Sunday. But I have a new piece given me. Aunt Constance marks it for me, and I read it every day, and learn it, and think about it, and try to understand it for myself. And then, when Sunday comes round again, I tell Aunt Constance what I have thought, and she tells me if I am right or not; and explains what I don't understand. Sometimes Uncle Willoughby comes and talks to us. I don't always understand when he and Aunt Constance get talking together; but I like to hear them. I think when I get big, I shall understand better. I remember a great deal that they say, and every year I think I learn fresh things. There is such a *lot* to learn," and the child heaved a great sigh.

Eugénie looked at her in surprise. It seemed as if this child were learning life's lessons so young.

"Does it make you unhappy, dear?"

"Oh no, not unhappy," was the quick answer. "I *know* God understands everything, and takes care of us all. Only, you know, so many people are wicked, or ill, or miserable, and so many things seem to go wrong, and to happen so—so dreadfully sadly. Don't you think it is very nice that some day we shall all be in

Heaven together, and nothing will hurt any of us then any more?"

"Ah yes, yes," answered Eugénie eagerly, almost forgetting, in her sympathetic comprehension, that she was only speaking to a child; "but it is so long to wait for that, and until then there seems no safety or help or peace anywhere."

"Oh, but there is!" cried Lily, her eyes lighting suddenly. "It is in my lesson to-day—at least, I am almost sure it means that. Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes do, please."

Lily opened her Bible and read,

"Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.

"And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'"

Lily looked up at that point and said simply,

"Isn't that nice?"

"What does it mean?" asked Eugénie, herself as simple, and almost more ignorant than the child, and not ashamed to learn from one.

"I am almost sure it means Jesus," answered Lily. "You know He was a Man; and it is He who takes care of us when we ask Him, and takes our sins away. Aunt Constance says it is only sin that makes sorrow; so you see if He takes away our sins, He must take the sorrow too, I suppose. It couldn't mean anybody but Jesus I am sure."

And Lily repeated softly and thoughtfully to herself the beautiful words,

"A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind,

and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place ; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' ”

“ ‘The shadow of a great rock in a weary land,’ ” repeated Eugénie with a dreamy smile ; and then there was a long silence.

“ It must mean Jesus, I think,” said Lily at last. “ It wouldn't do for anyone else. There's nobody else can help us like that.”

“ Can Jesus help us like that ? ” questioned Eugénie still in the same dreamy way. “ Can He be ‘ a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ’ ? ”

“ Oh yes.”

“ How ? ”

Lily found it easier to assert than to explain ; but she said presently,

“ He says He will take in *everyone* who comes to Him. You know, when He lived here, He *never* sent anyone away. It didn't matter how wicked, or sick, or poor they were, if they just *believed* He made them well again and forgave their sins. It always says that they ‘ went away rejoicing,’ so I know He must have made them happy. We can't help believing what Jesus says, because it's always true. People found Him just that when He lived here—Somebody they could go to when anything was the matter, and get it all put right, and we know He never changes—He is always just as ready to help us ; doesn't St. Paul say—‘ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ’ ? ”

Again there was a silence.

“ I hear voices,” said Lily at length. “ I think it

is Mamma and Aunt Constance come back," and she and Gascoigne ran off to meet them.

Eugénie sat very still in her place. By-and-by she spoke, as if to herself,

" 'A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. . . . Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever' "





CHAPTER XX.

CONSTANCE'S COUNSEL.

THE next few days passed very quietly for Eugénie, very quietly yet not unhappily. She had been passing through many phases of feeling—many phases of conviction—during the few past months of her life. Her whole nature had undergone a change; and now, after what had seemed an absolute chaos—a desolation of confusion past all remedy—order, light, and even beauty, were slowly beginning to form themselves.

“The wilderness shall blossom like the rose.”

Those words were some upon which Eugénie chanced to light, during these quiet days of thought and study, and they brought a smile to her lips.

She no longer walked helplessly and aimlessly through a maze of doubt, despairing of ever finding a way to the goal. Now the clue was in her hand, and she had learnt how to use it. Much she had yet to learn, many struggles lay before her, many battles had still to be fought out, battles with sin, with sorrow, with self. The narrow way is not an easy one to tread. Many and great are the obstacles which Satan places in each traveller's way; but Eugénie had found

her watchword, the very repetition of which gave her new peace and consolation and strength—

“A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.”

And then the beautiful corollary, which seemed like an echo from Heaven itself—

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

Could anything hurt very much looked at in the light of those words?

These quiet days were very blessed to Eugénie. It was as if she had laid aside the cares and burdens and responsibilities of life—had anchored her bark in some quiet nook, out of the whirl of the great stream which had carried her along thus far—and was resting on her oars, gathering strength and courage, before the inevitable moment should come when she must again launch forth upon the resistless current.

She gave little thought at this time, to the outward course her life must take, to the future which must be so sadly different from the past. It seemed to her then as if external life was but a dream, and **nothing** real but her own thoughts.

She did not talk much during this time, of preparation. Lucile, she felt, would not really understand her feelings, and Constance was very much occupied. Little Lily was her confidante more than anyone else, and the child's simple, earnest devotion and faith brought her great comfort and assurance. Gascoigne's loving protestations and caresses were sweet to her; and the little fellow did not forget that he was now his mother's mainstay and protection, and his baby care of her was **very** pretty to see

She felt almost afraid of the sudden quietude and sense of rest that had fallen upon her. Each day she dreaded lest something should come to disturb it. She put off thinking of the inevitable return to Linley Castle, for she shrank from it, even when most anxious to do her duty, without knowing why.

Lady Durley had made no more allusions to her return. Eugénie was an entirely free agent; but she began to grow conscious that the date could not be much longer postponed. Some subtle sense told her that even Lucile would no longer combat such a decision. Change of scene had done its work upon her. She had recovered faster both in mind and body, than had once seemed possible in so brief a space of time. Now surely her place was at home.

This in time came to be Eugénie's feeling, and she determined to speak to Constance about it. With Constance she felt that a curious sort of intimacy existed, not altogether unlike the friendship she felt towards Willoughby Beauchamp. Ostensibly she did not know either of them so very well—not nearly so well as Lucile, for instance—but yet there were things she could say to them, which Lucile could never understand; and she knew that either of them would comprehend and enter into certain feelings of hers in a way which would be quite impossible to their brilliant and beautiful cousin.

It was not always easy to secure a private interview with Constance; but fortune favoured Eugénie in this instance and gave her the opportunity she desired.

"Lucile," said her cousin one day, as they sat at lunch, "I think I must go and see old Mr. Mason's ixias to-day. I have waited to secure your companionship, as I am on no account to go alone. You have no

fixed engagement for this afternoon. Will you come with me?"

Lucile laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"Really, Constance, I would much rather be excused. I have not the least interest in the old madman or his flowers."

"He is such an oddity. He is quite worth going to see."

"I'm afraid I have no taste for oddities of that description. They bore me."

Constance laughed.

"But of the distinction of really having been within those mysterious precincts?"

"A kind of distinction I do not at all covet. If Mr. Mason had wished for the pleasure of my acquaintance, he should have set about obtaining it in the proper way."

"Fancy the old misanthrope paying a call," laughed Constance. "You know, Lucile, you can't possibly judge a man of his type by the ordinary standards."

"I don't see why not. I've no patience with people who put themselves on pedestals, and give out that they are too distinctly precious to conform to the ordinary rules of society. I don't think they ought to be given in to. Anyway, I don't choose to be the first to make the advance, just because an eccentric old man tells you that you can't even go round his garden without bringing a companion."

"Well, I daren't go alone," answered Constance, "I'm afraid he would eat me. Willoughby thinks he wants to see you, Lucile."

"Wants to see me!"

"Yes, he thinks he takes an interest in the family."

"Well, he takes an odd way of showing it, if he

does," and Lucile tossed her head. "I haven't the least interest in him, nor very much faith in Willoughby's theories. For a sensible man, Willoughby does get hold sometimes of very odd ideas."

Constance smiled to herself.

"Then you won't come, Lucile?"

"No, really I can't. I have a great dislike to frowsy old octogenarians, who plume themselves upon their eccentricities. I should not like him, and he would loathe me. I do not care to be dragged round a wilderness of a garden, and called a fool all the time, and have it made out that an inestimable favour is being conferred upon me. You can't really care about it yourself, Constance, though your tastes, I know, are peculiar upon some points."

"On the contrary, I want to go very much. I like the funny old man, and I like his flowers; but I do not care to go alone, after what he said."

"Take Eugénie with you then," said Lucile, "she looks as if she was thirsting to see the wild animal."

"I should like very much to go," answered Eugénie with a smile; "but he did not invite me."

"He did not invite anyone, if it comes to that," said Lucile, "he merely told Constance to 'bring somebody else' with her. A kitchen-maid would equally answer his purpose. If he meant me, he should have said so. I don't care about being treated like that. Lady Durley would agree with me in this instance, I flatter myself. I decline to be dragged there in that fashion. If you like to go, as Constance's friend, just to see the flowers, you can do so. That is rather a different thing."

"I should like to go," said Eugénie.

"Well, do so by all means. I think any little change would do you good."

"It is only a mile and a half, over the footpath through the park and the fields," said Constance. "Shall we walk?"

"Yes, I should like that very much," answered Eugénie eagerly. "It is cool and fresh to-day, and a walk would be very nice."

This point settled, it was not long before the two were on their way to the Rookery.

"Constance," said Eugénie, after they had walked for some minutes in silence, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"

"I want to ask your advice."

"Yes, dear?"

There was a short pause, concluded by,

"About going home."

"To Linley Castle, you mean?"

"Yes. I think I ought to go soon."

Constance looked at her with an approving smile.

"I think so too, Eugénie; though we shall miss you very much."

"You have been very kind, very good," answered Eugénie gratefully; then she hesitated, and added after a short pause, "but sometimes I wonder if I was right to come here at all."

Constance made no answer, and Eugénie exclaimed,

"Ah, you think so too! Then I am sure I did wrong. I am sorry; and yet I can't be very sorry. I have learnt here what I might not have learnt there."

Constance looked at her with sympathetic, questioning eyes.

"Yes, dear?"

"You know what I mean—what makes life begin to look bearable, even though I have lost so much.

Once I think I *could* not have borne it, but now I have help—oh, such help—‘The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.’ You know a little what that means, though you *cannot* feel it as I do, because you have never had your all taken from you. But you can understand what it is like to me.”

“Indeed I can.”

“Yes, I know, and now that He has done so much for me, I want to know what I can do for Him. I want to do His will.”

“He will be your guide, dear Eugénie. ‘I am the Way, the Truth, the Life.’”

“I know that, and I believe; but yet I do not always see my way plain. How can I always be sure that it is His will, not my own, that I am choosing?”

Constance smiled thoughtfully.

“That is a question which haunts us more or less all through our lives; but we have one great help in answering it.”

“What is that?”

“Prayer,” answered Constance, “earnest prayer for guidance and help—constant prayer for God’s own Spirit, to sanctify our lives and blend our wills with His. Eugénie, never forget to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Do you know, I think that we are apt to think too little of the Third Person of the Trinity. God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Redeemer, are often in our thoughts. We have, so to speak, distinct mental pictures of them and their attributes. But I sometimes fancy that we pay but little heed to the work of the Holy Spirit, and yet what can be more important for us than His sanctifying power? Did not our Saviour in His last farewell bid

His disciples pray for the Comforter, tell them that this same Comforter should 'teach them all things'? Did not the whole of the Apostolic ministry date from the giving of the Holy Ghost? If then our Lord's disciples, who had lived with Him, learnt His teaching, witnessed His death and resurrection, and been endowed by Him with miraculous power, if they had to wait for full realisation how to employ their gifts until the Holy Spirit had entered into their hearts, how can we hope to learn the will of God or to do Him service, if we do not earnestly pray that His Spirit may sanctify our lives, teach us and lead us in the way, and blend our will with our Lord's?"

Eugénie listened very earnestly and thoughtfully.

"I see," she said presently. "I do not think I understood that before."

There was a pause, which Constance broke by saying dreamily, as if to herself,

"'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'"

"I will try," said Eugénie very quietly; and for a long while the two walked on in silence.

When she spoke again it was upon the first subject.

"I will go back to Linley very soon. I am sure I ought; but it will not be very easy, because Lady Durley does not like me."

"It would be better, dear, not to think such things if you can help it. Teach her to love you. I think you will succeed by steady perseverance—more so now than ever before."

"I am not sure," answered Eugénie slowly. "I have vexed her by going away just now. Lady Durley, I am sure, does not easily forget; and then it makes it very

hard for me—because—because I know now that she never really loved Lionel. I do want to feel as I should ; but it is very hard to forgive—and harder to forget—a thing like that.”

“Eugénie, dear,” said Constance with gentle gravity. “Whoever has told you that, has done a wrong both to you and to Lady Durley. I am not in a position either to contradict or affirm what you say ; but this I know well—rumours of such a nature get about, and are passed on with inevitable exaggeration, and often without any foundation. And when a mother is so devoted to one son because he is an invalid, it may easily be thought that she neglects another who is strong and active and independent, although she will, in all probability, be giving him in reality a true mother’s love.”

Eugénie was not convinced, but her better feelings were touched.

“I will try to think as you do ; but you do not know how hard it is to love Lady Durley. I do not understand people who are so coldly kind. I resolve when away to be so dutiful and gentle and affectionate, and make her love me ; and then when the time comes and I see her, it all freezes up again, and I can hardly say a single word. It has been so each time she has been to see me, and will be so always I expect. I do try—indeed I do ; but I am sure she must dislike me very much, or she would not wither me up so.”

“Poor child,” said Constance gently. “I do understand partly ; but I cannot help hoping you may be wrong about Lady Durley. I know her so little that I cannot say ; but Willoughby always says she is a much kinder woman than people think. You are in a very

difficult position I know, and it may be harder to face after this interlude, than if you had always been there ; but I cannot help hoping and believing that all will come right ; and I am sure that constant prayer for God's guidance and His Spirit will be your great safeguard. You have learnt already Who is your sure Refuge in times of trouble."

"Yes," answered Eugénie softly ; and she walked on in thoughtful silence.

Presently she lifted her head, and said, with a flash of animation and pleasure,

"Constance, I think I will go home without any warning—take them by surprise. I think it will come more easily so. Perhaps they will be pleased. Perhaps Lady Durley will give me a chance to say that I am sorry I vexed her, and mean never to do so again. I don't want to write and say I am coming. I would rather go back and surprise them."

"Well then, do so, dear. It cannot do any harm, and, as you say, might surprise and please them. Lady Durley taken by storm might be more approachable."

Eugénie smiled to herself as she pursued her train of thought.

"If she would only love me—only let me be a kind of a daughter to her—as Lionel wished—how much happier we might be."

"You would like to be a daughter then?"

"Oh yes, if she would let me," was the quick answer. "Lionel wished it so much ; and—and—I do like Lady Durley a little. I could love her I am sure if she would only let me."

"Try to do so, whether she will let you or not," said Constance with a smile, "and see what comes of it."



CHAPTER XXI.

A VISIT TO A MISANTHROPE.

“**H**UMPH! So you have come again, have you? I hoped you would forget all about it. Well, and what do you expect to see now?”

Old Mr. Mason stood before his two visitors, his eyes scowling under their bushy brows, and his under lip pushed out in the usual way.

“Your garden in general, and your ixias in particular,” answered Constance serenely. “You need not pretend you are not very pleased to see us, for I am quite sure you like to exhibit your beautiful flowers to an appreciative company.”

“Humph!” growled old Mason again, and then he looked hard at Eugénie and said, “Is this your cousin, Mrs. Beauchamp?”

“No,” answered Constance, “your invitation was to anybody, if you remember, not to Lucile in particular. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mrs. Lionel Durley.”

Eugénie bent her head slightly. The old man stood looking hard at her.

“Ah,” he said at last, in an audible undertone, “the widow of the poor young fellow, who was missing and then dead—I understand.”

Eugénie's colour rose slightly. The word "widow" struck upon her ear with a sad and unfamiliar ring, despite the number of times she had herself employed it.

The momentary embarrassment his words had occasioned, seemed to strike Mr. Mason. To break the silence he turned upon Constance and asked irritably,

"And pray, why did not Mrs. Lucile accompany you? Does she not care for flowers?"

"Not so much as I do."

"And yet they tell me the Fontbury Park gardens are the best for miles round. I suppose my lady was too grand to come and see an old man like me? That is about it, eh?"

Constance smiled, and said something about his love of imputing motives, but her words were drowned in his harsh rejoinder,

"Oh ah, that is all very well! As if I didn't know the ways of the world after ninety years' experience! Well, let Mrs. Lucile stay away. I never did think much of her. It's her loss, not mine. She'll never get such another chance. You can tell her so, when you go back."

"I will," answered Constance with a smile.

"Much she'll care though," rejoined the old man cynically, "much she'll care now. But wait awhile, wait awhile. My lady will dance to another tune one of these days. What fools women are!" The last words were muttered to himself.

He took them round his garden, and showed them his flowers; but he seemed somewhat put out, all the time, Constance thought. He was even more snappish than usual, and she was afraid Eugénie would feel uncomfortable; but she looked amused and interested, and

was making friends rapidly with a large contingent of dogs, which followed the party round the gardens, and augmented itself at every turn.

Flowers were less interesting to her than animals; and when she had admired each new specimen, she generally stood aside and talked to the dogs, whilst the old gardener lectured to Constance upon the means he employed to produce certain results.

Old Mr. Mason did not appear to take any notice of her, which did not at all disturb her; but some men take note of everything that goes on around them, very much as though they had eyes in the back of their head.

When all had been seen—and it took some time to make a circuit of the extensive gardens—their host turned and asked,

“Did you drive here? Is your carriage waiting?”

“No,” answered Constance, “we walked.”

“Walked! I didn’t know women in these days ever had the sense to walk.”

“You see you have got behind the times. We do a vast variety of things of which you know nothing.”

“Humph! I know nothing of the world, don’t I? I’ve got behind the times, have I? Upon my word, young lady, you don’t lack for impudence. Don’t I know? I know quite well how women spend their youth now-a-days—playing games only fit for men, one half the day, and lounging away the other over three-volume novels. Oh yes, very nice education for the future all that is. Half a man and half a fool—that is the description that best fits the modern young lady. Behind the times indeed! I wish I were. The times

are growing positively disgusting. I wish they would leave me behind!"

Constance laughed.

"Are you not something of a pessimist, Mr. Mason? Are there not two sides to every question?"

"Oh, if you're going to talk Latin to me, I give in at once," snapped Mr. Mason. "The other side is the Girton blue stockings I suppose, who want to take degrees and wear men's clothes. If I had my way, I'd shut the whole lot of them up in a big lunatic asylum, to come to their senses. Senses! I don't believe they have any! If they had, they would know better than to preach, preach, preach the vast superiority of woman, and then ape the 'inferior sex' at every turn, and make themselves the laughing-stock of all sane men. I can't think what the world is coming to."

"If you lived a little more in it," answered Constance with a smile, "you would find that these people whom you so despise, are not so very different from the generality of the race. Human nature is pretty much the same wherever you meet it. It is never safe to condemn wholesale."

"It is never safe to talk to a woman now-a-days," retorted Mr. Mason, "especially when she has dabbled in cheap philosophy and modern metaphysics. Give me a woman who knows how to hold her tongue." Here he glanced at Eugénie with something of approbation. "If you ladies have walked, you will want a rest before you tramp home. We will sit down under this cedar-tree, you and I," still looking in the same direction, "and you, Miss Seymour, can go back and look again at the ixias, as I know you are thirsting to do. Come back in ten minutes, and I will give you a

cup of excellent coffee. Tea I never allow in my house. It is a noxious drug."

Eugénie was glad to sit down in the cool shade of the tree, and Constance was pleased to have leave to roam about alone.

The old man stood under the tree, looking into Eugénie's pensive face as though he would read her very soul. She was unconscious of his scrutiny, being engrossed by the attentions of the dogs.

By-and-by she heard herself addressed,

"You thought me a brute just now, Mrs Durley." She looked up, surprised.

"When?"

"For calling you a widow, I mean."

Again the colour rose in Eugénie's face.

"No indeed," she answered quietly, "I am a widow; only I have not grown used to the name."

He stood looking at her in his odd way, from under the scowling bushy brows. By-and-by he said,

"It is better sometimes to be a widow than a wife." She looked up at him quietly.

"Sometimes, perhaps—but not in my case."

"You cannot tell," he answered. "Suppose he had come home to you maimed, helpless, shattered—many soldiers do, you know—would not that be worse?"

"For him perhaps," answered Eugénie, after a brief pause, "but not for me."

"Ah!" he remarked after a significant pause, "I always did say that for selfish cruelty there was no match for a woman—a woman of gentle birth and breeding."

Eugénie's dark eyes were raised to his, with a look of startled inquiry.

"I do not understand."

"You must be slow of comprehension. You would rather have your husband back, to linger out a useless life of suffering and helplessness, than feel that all his troubles are over, and he safe and at rest somewhere. Well, well, there are some things I never shall understand."

"I could do so much for him if I had him with me," said Eugénie pleadingly. "It would be my life's work to nurse and tend and relieve him. He would understand—he would know what I mean."

"I know what you mean well enough," answered her interlocutor promptly, "but I should have thought experience would have taught you wisdom. Look at Sir John Durley. What has your care been able to do for him?"

"Not very much, I am afraid."

"Would you like to see your husband suffer as he does?"

"Oh no, no!" with a quick gesture of pain.

"Then do not quarrel with Providence," he replied with a certain solemnity of tone that blended oddly with his harsh, dictatorial accents. "When you go home just take your Bible, and read the story of Elisha and the Shunnamitish woman. For power and pathos, I do not think that story has its match in sacred or profane history. That woman loved her son—if ever human faith was tried and tested, hers was—yet to the question 'Is it well with the child?' she answered 'It is well.' She showed a wisdom in that answer which, to my thinking, Solomon never surpassed. Why cannot you say the same?"

Eugénie made no direct answer. She was altogether

astonished by the suddenness of this attack ; but it did not displease her, rather the reverse.

“I will think about what you have said.”

“Do,” he growled, more in his usual tones ; and as if half-ashamed of having been betrayed into a serious reflection, he added, “I don’t believe a woman ever did think to any purpose yet.”

“For a clever man,” returned Eugénie, “I think you seem to know remarkably little about women.”

He came and sat down beside her, and stared at her with unblushing scrutiny.

“How old are you ?” he asked.

“Twenty-two.”

“And I am ninety.”

“I know.”

“You know, and yet you have the impudence to speak to me like that !”

Eugénie smiled. She knew he was not vexed, and she did not mind how cross he looked.

“Mr. Mason,” she said, “I am going to ask you a favour.”

“Well, for cool impudence”—he was beginning, when Eugénie continued, with another smile, which silenced him by its peculiar sweetness,

“I want you to allow me to bring my little boy here some day, to see your dogs. He is so fond of them ; and,” looking straight into Mr. Mason’s eyes, “I should like him to see someone who was kind to his father when he was a boy. And perhaps you would like to see Ross again—the puppy that was your gift. He is the most devoted of companions to my little boy.”

The old man stared hard at her.

“How ever did you know?”

“I have only just found out—it has only just come to me. I never heard my husband mention your name, and your connection with his old friend never once struck me. But of course I remember his stories of the old man he believed to be an ogre, whose garden walls he scaled, and of the horrible fright he experienced when he was pounced upon by two or three great dogs, well shaken, and led unharmed to the master of the house, who lectured him till his hair stood on end, and then sent him home with a pocket full of plums. I wonder I never thought of it before; but I always fancied Lionel’s old friend ‘the ogre’ was dead. And so this is really the garden where he played—and these are the dogs, or their successors. Please may I bring my little boy here some day? It will be to him the realisation of his favourite fairy tale.”

“Oh yes, the little chap may come. I detest children, but he may come for his father’s sake. Is he like him?”

“They all say he is just like Lionel at the same age,” answered Eugénie.

“And you really have the dog? Five or six years old he must be by now. How time flies! Ay, ay, bring the pair of them. Gracious me! I sha’n’t know myself soon with such a rabble about the place! I must be getting into my dotage. What next, I wonder! Women and children! To think that such a simple thing would lead to this! I shall never know an hour’s peace soon!”

Whilst he was jerking out these sentiments, in his blunt, growling way, Eugénie was looking wistfully

round her, recalling memories of half-forgotten stories, how her husband in his boyish days had paid many a secret visit to the "ogre's" gardens, and had received much oddly-expressed kindness from him, always on the understanding that not a soul should be made aware of these stolen visits. The secret had been so well kept, that until Lionel had told the tale to his wife in after years no one had the faintest idea that the foot of a Durley had ever penetrated into the mysterious recesses of the misanthrope's home.

She was roused from her reverie by feeling the old man's eyes fixed very keenly upon her. She looked back and smiled.

"Mrs Durley," he said, "are you to be trusted?"

"I hope so."

"Your husband kept a secret before he was your age. Can you keep one too?"

"I think so."

He looked still at her, half shaking his head. "I like your face," he said dispassionately. "I don't generally like pretty women; but I think I can get on with you. I wonder now if you are to be trusted with a secret."

"You shall judge for yourself. I will make no protestations."

"You are not dying, burning, yearning to hear it?"

"Not at all."

"You would not be terribly disappointed if I declined to trust you after all?"

"No, certainly not. A secret involves responsibility; I do not think I crave that."

He looked at her in silence, nodding his head the while. "Well, well, well," he said at length, "we shall

see, we shall see." Then with a sudden change of tone he added,

"You know these Beauchamp people very well?"

"I am getting to know them well."

"Do you like them?"

"Yes, very much. They have been very kind to me."

He eyed her somewhat askance, rubbing his chin with his hand.

"Are you on very confidential terms with them?"

"I hardly know. I feel to know them quite well."

"Then do you know—ah here she comes, so we shall have no time for confidences to-day—but do you know if Constance Seymour and Willoughby Beauchamp are engaged to be married?—and if not, why not?"

With which very odd questions, the privacy of the interview abruptly ended.





CHAPTER XXII.

CONFIDENCES.

EUGÉNIE felt, as she walked home from the Rookery, as if she had ample food for thought, both as regards her own affairs and those of her friends.

The questions which Mr. Mason had started—was Constance Seymour engaged to Willoughby Beauchamp? and if not, why not?—haunted her with strange persistency. She had never heard of any engagement, nor did she think that one existed; and yet nobody could live many weeks at Fontbury Park without being conscious that a very warm friendship existed between those two, and that they were always considered to belong, in a manner, to one another.

Lucile always spoke of “Constance and Willoughby,” as if the two were practically one, and Constance was always understood to be acquainted with the details of his life and work, and was referred to, in his absence, for such information as would naturally be expected from him. It seemed in fact, as if a closer bond existed between those two than was usual, even between others who had known each other intimately from their childhood upwards.

Eugénie had never given this subject much thought before ; but she did so now, and wondered whether some engagement might not exist between them. She was convinced that Constance was deeply attached to her cousin. What his feelings were she could not tell ; but she fancied that Constance was very dear to him.

“ Lucile,” she said that evening, when the two were alone together after dinner, and the idea of her sudden return to Linley Castle had been fully discussed.

“ Lucile, is Constance engaged to Dr. Beauchamp ? ”

Lucile laughed lightly and raised her eyebrows.

“ You had better ask them,” she said.

“ But surely you must know ! ”

“ Indeed I do not. Of course it is what we have all expected this year and more—it seems quite absurd to let such a thing hang fire all this while, when anybody can see how it must end ; but either they are ridiculously reserved about their affairs, or else Willoughby is waiting till he has a larger practice. He is very foolish I think, to be so long making up his mind.”

“ Could he afford to marry ? ”

“ Oh yes, quite well. He is getting on fast, and might get on much faster if he chose.”

“ How ? ”

“ Oh, you know he spends such a lot of time and money, poking round dirty parts of the town, doing sanitary commissioner’s work, instead of increasing his practice. I dare say it is very good training, and teaches him a good deal ; but there is a limit to everything, and I think it is time he reached it. He is very well thought of in the county, and could have as many well-to-do patients as he chose, if he would only give up his mania for dirty ones who don’t pay.”

Eugénie smiled a little.

"He is very generous and devoted."

"Oh very; only I wish his devotion would take another form."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Constance, to be sure. It may be very worldly and selfish, but I rank Constance's happiness before the Fontbury drains, and if Willoughby were not the most humble minded of men as regards his own personal attractions, I should feel inclined to give him a good shaking."

"What for?"

"To shake the nonsense out of him. He ought to know by this time, that Constance worships the ground he treads on."

"Is it so?"

"To be sure—though I doubt if she knows it herself, poor child, and I never say anything to her on the subject, though I am sometimes half-disposed to. It's a relief sometimes to speak out to somebody, and I know you are safe, and will let it go no farther; but I do get out of all patience with Willoughby sometimes."

"He is so good," said Eugénie surprised.

"Yes, I know—too good, I think. Do you know, Eugénie, there are some men—and Willoughby is one—who would be almost perfect married, but who grow prigs when left in single blessedness. Now don't start so indignantly—you remind me of Constance. I should never dare to utter such a sentiment in her hearing; but all the same it is true. I love Willoughby as if he were my brother, I have the very greatest reverence for him as a man; but, at the same time, I say of him, as I do of some of those celibate

young clergymen one meets, and whose devotion one greatly admires, that a wife is all he wants to give him just that touch of softness and human—shall I say, weakness?—that would make him all one could wish. As husband and father, I believe Willoughby would be almost ideally perfect; as he is now, I fear he may grow didactic and enthusiastic, without becoming truly sympathetic.”

Eugénie was not quite sure if she understood; but she was pleased by Lucile’s manner, which was more earnest and thoughtful than usual.

“A doctor ought to be married,” continued Lucile, after a pause; “particularly a man of Willoughby’s temperament, who is so very much in earnest, and who looks upon it as a sort of sacred duty to find a remedy for every ill, mental or physical, which comes under his notice. He never thinks of such things himself; but he often talks to women in a fashion which is not usual for a young unmarried man to do, and everybody cannot know by instinct his pure nobility of nature, and catholicity of feeling. ‘*Honi soi qui mal y pense*’ Frank says to me when I tell my fears to him; but people will think ill whenever they can, and I should so hate to have Willoughby misunderstood. Why cannot he marry Constance, and settle down to a comfortable life of wedded bliss? They were just made for one another. Apart, they are a trifle over-serious and *dévoté*; together, with one another to live for, and with the happiness they would mutually give, they would be perfection itself, and would live a noble and devoted life, without that touch of asceticism and lofty *separateness* (if you know what I mean) which half spoils them both now.”

"I wish they would," answered Eugénie with sympathy. "Why do they not?"

"I cannot tell. I wish you would ask Constance straight out, as you asked me just now, whether she was engaged to Willoughby, and see what she says."

"I should not like," answered Eugénie.

"She would not mind; she is too honest and simple-minded; but I should like to know what she had to say on the subject. It is one on which I never can speak to her. I am afraid of saying too much."

Eugénie did not altogether like the mission with which she was entrusted; but she did not wish to refuse Lucile, and she had, of late, drawn more close to Constance than during the earlier part of her visit.

When she was walking with her in the dewy garden, later on that same evening, and the talk chanced to fall upon Willoughby and his life, the chance seemed to be too good a one to be lost.

"Are you engaged to him, Constance?" she asked simply and directly.

"No," answered Constance, quietly, adding after a brief pause, "what made you ask?"

"I was wondering about it. You seem so very much to one another."

"Willoughby is like a very dear brother to me," answered Constance. But I do not think he will ever marry."

"But doctors always do marry," remarked Eugénie. "Why not he?"

"Marriage would hamper his work you know," was the quiet answer. "He gives so much time away now, he could not afford to do that if he had a wife."

Constance spoke with a needless amount of gravity

and steadiness, it was evident to Eugénie that her heart was not free. For a moment a feeling akin to indignation rose up in the young widow's mind against the absent Willoughby.

"Don't you think, Constance," she asked, "that love should come before everything?"

"I am not sure, I should almost put duty first."

Eugénie drew a long breath.

"Ah!" she said, "then you cannot know what real love is."

"Do I not!" exclaimed Constance in sudden agitation, "would that I did not!"

She turned away her head, and seemed to struggle with herself. Eugénie laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder and said tenderly,

"I understand. Poor Constance!"

"You should not have spoken so to me," cried Constance, with a vehemence that was startling from one of her temperament. "You have taken an unfair advantage of me. It is not kind, Eugénie."

"Dear Constance, forgive me. Indeed I did not mean to hurt you."

Constance recovered her self-possession by an effort, and smiled bravely.

"I knew you did not. It was foolish of me to be so weak. I cannot think how I came to betray myself so foolishly. I must throw myself upon your generosity, Eugénie. You have surprised my secret."

Eugénie's face was very grave.

"I am sure he loves you; and if you love him, why does he not—"

"Hush, Eugénie!" interrupted Constance with an accent of pain in her voice. "I cannot have you

speak, or even think so. Willoughby is leading a noble life of devotion and self-sacrifice. He is living more nearly up to his ideal than any man I have ever known. I would rather suffer tenfold more than I do, than be the means of dragging down his life, and standing in his way of doing good in the sphere he has chosen for himself. It is enough for me to be his sister and friend ! ”

Was it trouble, or what was it that had given to Eugénie a maturity of thought somewhat beyond her years ? Three months ago she could not have spoken as she now did.

“ Is not love God’s own gift to us, Constance, and His best gift ? Does He not always give it for some good purpose of His own ? Do you think He means us to set it on one side, as though it were of no value ? Do you not think that love has the greatest influence of all upon our lives ? If we feel that a great love is the gift of God, are we right in not yielding to its impulse ? ”

“ How can I tell ? How can I know ? ” answered Constance with some agitation. “ It is no use telling *me* such things. ”

There was an unconscious and pathetic emphasis upon the “ *me* ” which was easily understood.

Eugénie sighed and looked perplexed.

“ Dr. Beauchamp is such a good man that it does not seem as if he could do anything wrong ; and yet—and yet—— ”

“ Well ? ”

“ I cannot see why he should think that he may not love one, who seems just to have been given him by God, to made his life more happy and more beautiful.

God can see everything. He knows everything, and we know that love is His best and highest gift. He would not send it, I am sure, if He did not mean us to take it. He meant a man's wife to be a help-meet, not a hindrance, and what He planned can surely be carried out, if His blessing is asked."

Constance made no reply. Every question has two sides. Heretofore she had only looked on the one. Now Eugénie had drawn her attention to the other. She almost felt that she would rather have been left alone to her old convictions. Did not Willoughby better understand such questions than Eugénie? Was not his judgment surer and truer than hers? She knew well his serious view of the responsibility of life and talents. Could so good a man be mistaken on such a point? It seemed almost treason to entertain the doubt.

A firm step in the distance warned them of an approach from the house.

"It is Willoughby," whispered Constance. "I cannot meet him. I must run away. Go and talk to him. I don't want to see him to-night."

Eugénie had only just time to recover her customary composure, before Dr. Beauchamp was shaking hands.

"Good evening, Mrs. Durley. I was told I should find you and Constance out here. Where is she?"

"Gone indoors—to bed, I fancy. She has a headache, I think. We walked all the way to the Rookery and back this afternoon; perhaps that tired her. Mr. Mason was very amusing. He is much more sociable than one would think. I wonder why he shuts himself up so oddly."

"I think it's a way that has grown upon him, as his

old friends died off. It must be an odd thing to outlive two or three generations. I suppose he did not care to make new friends to replace old, and gradually came to see no one, and care for nothing outside his own gates. It is a habit of mind that grows rapidly when once established."

"I suppose so," responded Eugénie absently, and Willoughby broke the pause that followed.

"I hear that you are going to leave us."

"Yes, I find I have been here nearly a month. I think I ought to go home."

"Perhaps it would be better so."

"Although I cannot feel that I am wanted."

"Do not be too sure of that. I fear, in any case, you will be sorely wanted before very long."

His voice was so grave that Eugénie asked quickly, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Sir John is failing very fast. His illness has taken a new turn. The suffering will, I hope, be less than once I feared; but the end cannot be very far off. I tell you this because I think you ought to be warned. It may be a question of some four or five months, or it may only last a few weeks. At present I can give no definite opinion as to the time: but in all human probability, Sir John Durley's life cannot outlast the present year."

Eugénie's face had grown very grave. Willoughby continued, almost as if speaking to himself,

"And who will comfort the broken-hearted mother?"

"If only I could!" cried Eugénie earnestly. "If only she would let me try!"

"Try, without waiting for permission," was Willoughby's advice. "A daughter comes next to a son."

Eugénie's next question was put in a very low voice.

"Does she know?"

"Not at present, I believe; but Sir John had some conversation with me upon the subject yesterday; and I told him the exact state of his condition, as far as I know it. He seemed to think that his mother ought perhaps to be made aware of it also, and I could not but think the same."

"Oh, poor Lady Durley!"

"Ay indeed; yet I doubt if it be the truest kindness to keep her in the dark. I believe she has no idea but that her son may live for years. People find it so hard to see what they dread so much; and Sir John has not changed visibly for the worse of late. It is a great pity that they have no family physician who is also an old friend. If that had been the case, Lady Durley might have been saved much."

"Why should she not have made a friend of you?"

The incipient indignation of the tone made Willoughby smile.

"We must take people as they are, not as we would have them, Mrs. Durley. There is so very much to like and respect and admire in Lady Durley that it is not for me to criticise her."

"Nor for me either," responded Eugénie quickly.

"I do like Lady Durley very much *now*, though I doubt if you believe me."

"I do indeed, if you say so."

"You mean I have not given people cause to think so—that I have not behaved as I ought at this time? I believe not. I can see now that I should have acted differently; but it is not too late to begin again, is it? I can learn better even now, and show her that I am

sorry. I did not mean to do wrong, indeed ; but I was so miserable and confused, I hardly knew what I was doing. I have learned a great deal since then. I think I can do better now."

Willoughby smiled at the childlike eagerness of words and tone.

"You can do more than anybody else at a time like this, and in the future which lies before Linley Castle," he answered with a certain gravity which struck his listener more than the words.

"I will go home to-morrow," said Eugénie quickly. "I will go home, and do whatever I can for him and for her. Poor Lady Durley. It will be like being twice a widow. Ah ! I think I know just what she will feel. Perhaps we may comfort one another."





CHAPTER XXIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

ON the terrace at Linley Castle sat Lady Durley and her son. It was a beautiful evening, warm, and calm, and bright, and Sir John's thin face wore a very peaceful look.

Lady Durley seemed to have aged somewhat during the past weeks. Sorrow had traced furrows in her brow which the hand of time had failed to draw, and these lines gave a softness to the face which was new to it, and which certainly did not detract from its beauty, but rather lent an added charm.

Once or twice she looked at her son, and presently said with a smile,

"You are better, John. I am sure of it. You have been steadily improving of late. I hoped it would be so after the worst of the summer's heat was passed. You have had much less pain of late."

"Much less," he assented quietly.

"I am so thankful for that. If you could once lose those attacks which so exhaust your strength, what wonderful progress you would make. Does Dr. Beauchamp hold out any hopes?"

"Hopes of what?"

"Of being able to arrest the pain, and keep it from recurring so frequently?"

"I believe he thinks that the worst is over now. I think I shall have much less to suffer in the future, thank God!"

Lady Durley's face echoed this note of gratitude, though all she said was,

"Then the crisis is really past?"

"One crisis, I suppose. I believe Dr. Beauchamp considers that my illness has taken a turn."

Lady Durley's face expressed a deep and tranquil satisfaction; but Sir John did not see it, his eyes were averted, his face wore an expression which his mother did not understand.

"John," she said, with a curious mingling of eagerness and hesitation, "I believe you have something to tell me."

"Yes," he answered quietly, "you are right, mother, I have."

She clasped her hands closely together; her eyes were shining with a strange intensity of feeling. Her voice quivered, as she said,

"I believe I know your news, John."

Still his eyes were averted. He did not look at her, but only answered gently—

"Yes, mother?"

He was not surprised that she should know, and it was a relief not to have to speak the dreaded words. He had grown so well used to the thought of approaching death—death had so long appeared to him in the guise of a friend and not a foe, that it was not any marvel to him to hear it spoken of quietly, and even tranquilly. That any one could entertain a hope of

his restitution to health and strength, never even crossed his mind. He had been a doomed man for years past, and he was convinced that his mother knew this as well as he did himself.

Lady Durley waited for the next sentence which should give certainty to the vague hopes forming within her, but it came not. She had herself to give utterance to the guess she had formed.

"John," she said in the same eager, tremulous way, "you mean that you are going to get well, that this mysterious disease has worn itself out at last, and that you will end your days in health and peace."

Sir John started, and looked earnestly and tenderly into the flushed face of his mother.

"In peace I pray God that I may ; but, mother, my dearest, most loving mother, do you really mean that you have entertained any hopes of my recovery—in this world?"

The light faded from Lady Durley's face, a grey shade stole over the cheeks that had just before worn the flush of sudden hope.

"You said you were better—had passed a crisis—hoped to be spared the worst of the pain for the future," answered Lady Durley in a strange unnatural voice. "What does all that mean, if not that you may hope to recover?"

"Ah, what? Mother, can you not see for yourself?" But Lady Durley would not allow herself to see.

"You said you had something to tell me, John. I suppose you are recommended to try German baths, or some treatment of that sort. Now that you have taken a turn, I suppose travelling might be possible for you?"

"Mother," said Sir John gently, "it is true that a journey lies before me ; but it is the journey I have looked forward to, with as much patience as I could, through many long years. The thought of it is not new to either of us, and the parting will not be for long."

"Parting !" echoed Lady Durley with a certain strange sharpness in her voice. "What nonsense next, I wonder ! As if I should allow you to go alone."

He did not answer, only looked at her, and suddenly her self-control gave way, and she buried her face in her hands.

"You will not be long after me, mother," he said, "and in the blessed ocean of eternity, all these little partings will be swallowed up."

But there was no answer.

"I would have spared you, mother, if I had not loved you too well ; but you do not see, you have not understood, and it would have been cruel to let you go on cherishing false hopes. Mother, you have always been so unselfish for me, so forgetful of all but my well-being and happiness. Be unselfish once again, and do not grudge me the peace and rest I so sorely crave—that peace of God which passeth all understanding."

No answer still, only a deep-drawn breath, more like a sob than a sigh.

"Mother, my own most loving mother, I would have been content to stay with you, had God so willed it, little as I can do to solace you, and great as is the burden of care I have always laid upon you. Yet if God had spared me to you, I would have blessed Him for it in your name, and waited with patience for the promised rest. But He has decreed that I shall lay my

burden down. He has sent His blessed messenger to tell me that my work is nearly done. Weak, imperfect, erring as I am, He has called me to come to Him. How can I help rejoicing to think of that glorious day when I shall stand before my Father's Throne, washed white in the Blood of the Lamb?"

Lady Durley still sat, bowed down as with grief. She made no answer, gave no glance into the peaceful face of her son, which seemed to shine as he spoke, as if the soul was already looking out through the hollow eyes into the unknown future. Only after a long pause she asked,

"When?"

"I cannot tell. It may be weeks, it may be months; but it cannot be very much longer. Mother, it would not be kindness to deceive you: to buoy you up with false hopes. It is hardly likely that I shall live after the fall of the leaf."

Silence after this, deep silence. Then a few bitter words from the sorrow-stricken woman.

"If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

Another long silence.

"Mother," said Sir John at last, "if God has decreed that you shall lose two sons, he has not left you quite comfortless. You have a daughter now to love, and a grandson."

But Lady Durley was not to be comforted. In the bitterness of her grief she spoke with unusual heat.

"A daughter indeed! A daughter! Why mock me by such a word? Has she not shown us both the attitude she means to assume towards us? Daughter! You know better than that yourself, John. Lionel's wife will never be a daughter to me!"

"Mother!" cried Sir John quickly, with a sudden ring of pain in his voice.

Lady Durley looked up to see Eugénie standing before her. Unannounced, quiet, full of hope and of the surprise she was going to give them, she had stolen upon them unobserved, only to hear her kinship bitterly repudiated.

"My dear child!" cried Sir John, rising and taking her hands in a warm clasp. "I am pleased indeed to see you again!"

She looked at him and smiled, but all the light had died out of her face. Her lip trembled a little as she spoke,

"I wanted to come back to you. I wanted to come home. I thought I might do so without asking leave beforehand."

"Of course, of course." Sir John bent his head and kissed the tearful eyes. He knew and she knew what was in the minds of both; but they durst give no expression to their feelings of dismay.

When Eugénie turned round to greet her mother-in-law, it was to find that Lady Durley had already made her way indoors, with a precipitancy most unusual with her.

"She cannot even speak to me or welcome me home without careful deliberation," thought Eugénie. "She is determined that I shall never be anything to her. I will try, I will do what I can, but things are even worse than I thought. How hard it is once to recover a false step."

Sir John's face expressed great pain and concern.

"Poor mother!" he said gently. "You must not misunderstand her silence, Eugénie. I have just been

breaking some bad news to her. She is very much overcome."

Eugénie looked up at him with a glance of comprehensive sympathy.

"Perhaps you know," he said.

Her lip quivered, and the tears started to her eyes.

"About yourself?"

He bent his head.

The foregoing scene had somewhat unnerved Eugénie too, as it seemed, for she too sank down, weeping freely and quietly.

"My dear child, my dear child, do not, pray do not!" pleaded Sir John. "I think you have known this some time, Eugénie. For all our sakes, you must be brave."

"I have tried, indeed I have," broke out Eugénie with the impetuosity of restrained emotion; "but oh, how can we live without you—our one link gone? It will be too dreadful. Oh John, why can't you live? Think what it will be like without you!"

He stroked her hair, and tried to comfort her; but it was difficult, in the face of what had happened, to be very consolatory. It was useless to ignore the state of hurt feeling which existed between Lady Durley and her daughter-in-law, and yet too much in the way of explanation and apology was apt, as Sir John well knew, to do more harm than good.

He did not know how Eugénie longed to be a comfort to his mother. All he knew was that she feared her more than a little, and that it was difficult for the two to maintain easy relations.

"We must try, we must try, we must help one

another," said he gently. "Dear Eugénie, I am sure you were sent to be a comfort to us all."

"I want to be," answered Eugénie tearfully; but she was much depressed. She had pictured such a different home-coming, such a different reception. It was very hard to have the bright illusion shattered at one blow.

The meeting with Lady Durley, later on, could not fail to be very stiff and formal. Kisses were exchanged and mutual inquiries made; but a sense of strange restraint hung over both, and it was a relief to both when the interview ended.

Dinner passed by in solemn silence, which was not often broken. Lady Durley, weighed down by the sorrowful news she had just heard, could neither talk nor eat without manifest effort, and Sir John was grieved and disturbed by the whole condition of affairs.

Eugénie was burdened by a painful sense of nervous oppression, which made the very atmosphere of the room all but intolerable. Old associations were crowding upon her, recollections of former solemn dinners and dismal hours of loneliness. Never before had she realised so painfully the fact of her own widowhood, as when she sat at the long table at Linley Castle, and noticed the signs of mourning upon those about her.

She looked so pale by the time the meal was ended, that Sir John kindly suggested a retreat to her own room, of which chance Eugénie gladly availed herself. Anything to avoid a tête-à-tête with her mother-in-law, after having overheard the words which were the first to greet her on her return home. She kissed Lady

Durley and said "good-night," in a low voice that seemed to tremble a little, and she was thankful to hear the door of the room close behind her, and to feel herself free to go to her child.

Sir John, who had risen to open the door, returned to his seat with a sigh.

"You see how it is," said Lady Durley quietly. "The fault is mine almost more than hers; but some natures never can understand each other."

"I see no reason why you and Eugénie should not understand each other," answered Sir John gently. "Mother, she is Lionel's wife."

"I know, I would be a mother to her if I could, but you see how she shrinks from me."

"Is that unnatural after what she heard? She is very sensitive, very humble, I think."

"It began long ago—this is but a continuation."

Sir John sighed. He loved them both, and it seemed hard that they could not learn to know one another. Much there was that was loveable in both. What was the link now missing, that would bind their hearts together?

"Mother," he said with a smile that was half sad and very tender, "I think you have no love for any one but me. When I am gone, you will learn to love Eugénie, for she loves me too,—God bless her—and she will help to comfort you."

"Do not talk to me, so, John," said Lady Durley quickly. "I cannot bear it."

And then she too rose and quitted the room, and Sir John was left alone with his own thoughts.



CHAPTER XXIV.

CONFLICTS.

EUGÉNIE had returned to her home in a very different spirit from the one in which she had left it.

Very earnestly, indeed, did she wish to do right; and she had found during this past month of spiritual progress, the true key to the mysteries and discipline of life. The love of God had taken root in her heart, and faith in Christ had become the deepest conviction of her awakened soul. She had found in Him a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, and in the strength of this new love, life had assumed for her a new aspect, and one that was not all dark.

In the quiet seclusion of Lucile's house, Eugénie had mapped out her future life with a sense of pleasure and gentle resignation.

She would go home to Linley Castle in her early widowhood, and Lady Durley would pity her first, and by degrees grow to love her; and she for her part would be a model daughter-in-law, and soothe by her loving ministrations, the sorrows and the trials which advancing years must bring in their wake to one who was soon to lose her all.

Eugénie's nature was essentially a loving one. To her mind the task she had set herself was a very sweet one, and might not be very hard. It was true that she and her mother-in-law had not got on very cordially at the first; but then Eugénie was honest enough to recognise how morbid and unhealthy her own state of mind had been, and how easily she had taken alarm or affront, when no ill-will had been meant.

All that was changed now, as it seemed to her. The wave of deep sorrow that had gone over her, had washed away all those petty feelings of irritation and jealousy; and the love of God which had filled her heart, had traced upon it characters of patience, submission, gratitude that could surely be neither misunderstood nor evaded.

Looking into the future, as Eugénie had done of late, in the light of her newly-found peace, it had seemed to her that no obstacle could hinder her in the course she had mapped out for herself, that nothing could again seem very hard to bear, nor upset the calm which had settled upon her.

Surely no troubles of this world could disturb the peace which God had given.

Who has not felt this assurance when first setting out in the "straight and narrow way," from which the gates of Heaven seem as if they could not be far distant?

Which of us, when first the light of God's love has penetrated our hearts, has not felt as if all the trials and troubles of life could never rob us of our happiness and our peace?

Which of us has not looked calmly upon those "trifles" which used to vex and irritate us, convinced that they will never irritate us more? Who has not

passed in review all possible causes of annoyance and vexation, and has come to the conclusion that never again will such petty troubles have power to harass us, or to remove our serene sense of God's protecting care?

"What can anything in this life matter?"—have we not all of us used in thought some such form of words? "What can anything matter, so long as God is loving us and caring for us? This life is but for a season. Its pleasures and its troubles will soon be over. Why do we think and care so much? Surely the thought of what lies beyond is enough—surely with *that* in view we can bear all else calmly and happily."

I suppose that hardly one amongst us, but has thought after this fashion in those moments when God has seemed very near, and Heaven almost within our grasp.

Seemed I say, for let us remember that God is just as near us when we are toiling along the arid plain of life, feebly trying to follow in His footsteps, though weighed down by a heavy burden of human sin and weakness, as He is in those rarer and thrice blessed moments when we become aware of His protecting love and care, and feel that He is indeed "the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

And in these moments of rest and peace so mercifully vouchsafed to us, we have felt as if this protecting love and sense of nearness could never again desert us, that no earthly matters could ever again disturb us; but has this been the case?

Surely not, save after very long struggles, after many failures, many slips, many moments of absolute despair. Some never attain to it, even after a lifetime of earnest endeavour. None, I think, reach it until after long

years of earnest striving. From time to time we meet with some Christian man or woman, who seems to live in an atmosphere of love and peace and a nearness to God, which nothing has power to shake. We thank God in our hearts when we see this, for such a visible manifestation of His Fatherly love. But if we question these same people, we find that the sweet serenity which we would fain emulate, is not the growth of a week, a month, a year, but the result of a lifelong battle against sin itself—a battle that has been steadily fought out in the teeth of reverses, defeat, disaster of every kind, and has only been won in the power of God's unceasing might and unwavering goodness.

But the young do not know this. They see or imagine results, without realising the slow course of events which produce them.

The young soldier sets out upon his career full of hope, and sees himself already crowned with glory and success. He forgets the long hours of toil and distress that lie between him and his goal, the weary marches, the terrible battles, the wounds, the privations, the moments of actual, though not irretrievable defeat.

God is good to grant us this habit of mind—to give us power to grasp the glory of the victory, without seeing the full heat of the conflict. If we knew all, we might feel hopelessly discouraged, as it is we are full of joy and confidence.

This was Eugénie's frame of mind during the past days of her life.

Deeper than her deep grief at her husband's death, lay the peaceful assurance of God's all-seeing goodness, and a faith in Christ's redeeming love which could not but keep despair away.

Love of God had borne its natural fruit in love towards man, and Eugénie was convinced that in this new and deep love for all around her, she could not again give way to any of the feelings which had been so distressing to her in past days.

She had gone home in an impulse of love and pity, ready to give a daughter's love to the lonely mother, who was so soon to be left childless, ready to forget all past differences, and to lavish a wealth of filial love upon one, whom she had formerly treated with needless distrust, and the ingratitude of misconception, ready and eager, in fact, to do all this and even more; yet now after all this thought, and planning and anticipation, what had been the result?

Mother and daughter-in-law had met under circumstances so trying, that nothing had been able to overcome mutual coldness and embarrassment. The meeting that might have done so much good, had only done irretrievable harm.

A sudden and severe check at starting is a formidable obstacle to any cause; and Eugénie felt that the words which she had overheard, were the death-blow to all her cherished hopes.

Lady Durley was not a woman to speak upon impulse, nor one to lose easily an impression once received. She had resented Eugénie's leaving the Castle when she did, and it was an offence which was evidently neither to be forgotten nor forgiven.

This was the young widow's determined, and not altogether erroneous conviction, and it seemed to deal the death-blow to all her cherished hopes.

Like all young creatures she was impetuous and enthusiastic, and was impatient of delay. She wanted

to carry everything by storm, and having failed in this, she was disposed to yield to unreasonable despair.

The constraint which such a meeting could not but produce, seemed to her like an icy wind blowing upon a garden of flowers and withering all before it. Her bright hopes faded one by one, faded and dropped, and by the end of a week the old relations seemed adopted between mother and daughter-in-law, cold kindness on the one side, and timid constraint, not unmingled with irritation upon the other.

Yes, Lady Durley did irritate Eugénie, do what she would to master the feeling, or to ignore it. She did not yield without a struggle, her sincere wish to do right helped her, her prayers for strength and guidance were not left unanswered. She was able to maintain a gentle submissiveness and sweetness of demeanour that was not without its effect; but at the same time she was conscious of inward irritation and chafing, and at times of a distrust which had been buried for a time, but not killed.

More mischief is made in the world by good-natured thoughtlessness, and a desire to see that people are not "put upon," than by actual back-biting and conscious slander.

Lucile Beauchamp, in her warm partisan feeling for Eugenie, and her wish to advise her rightly as to the duties of the rather difficult position which she occupied, had most certainly spoken unadvisedly with her lips. Without perhaps going beyond the limits of truth, she had certainly conveyed a false impression of Lady Durley's character, and one that was particularly unfortunate in the result it produced upon Eugénie's mind.

Lucile had not spoken altogether without spitefulness

when she had warned her friend against her mother-in-law.

Lady Durley's coolness towards the new owners of Fontbury Park had been deeply, though not loudly resented by the mistress, who gave a far greater significance to it than the matter warranted.

Lady Durley was certainly proud and exclusive ; but there was nothing petty in her pride. If she had been in the way of making new friendships, she would have been ready to accept friendly relations from the Beauchamps, but as it was, she shrank with the reserve of a peculiarly self-contained nature from any but the most formal relations with strangers. Sir John had not health, and she had not inclination for social claims, and she hardly saw any but the few old friends who still remained in the neighbourhood. She had not liked Willoughby Beauchamp, though she could not herself have explained why ; still she thought well of him as a medical man, and both he and his family somewhat exaggerated the antipathy which they believed she indulged towards them. She had been fairly willing for Eugénie to make friends of these neighbours, and had entertained no really hostile feelings towards them ; and would have been much surprised had she been made aware of Lucile's deep, though concealed resentment.

Eugénie was not aware of it either, or she might have paid less heed to some of Lucile's hints : but although she had tried to forget some of her words, she had not been altogether successful in the effort.

Loving loyalty to her husband, and devotion to her child were amongst Eugénie's most marked characteristics ; and both of these instincts had been roused to arms by Lucile's ill-judged words.

Gascoigne's liberties and rights were in danger of being set aside or infringed (so Eugénie fancied Lucile had said) and it beloved her to watch over him very carefully, and assert her authority very determinedly, in order that her influence should not be undermined. Lady Durley was not to be permitted to gain too much ascendancy over either of them.

This warning would have mattered but little, had those intimate relations between the two women been established which Eugénie had fondly pictured; but in the present state of affairs there was danger of rupture, for the element of love, which fuses all differences, had not yet made its way into the two hearts which were so eager to welcome it; and without love, how can mutual comprehension and concession be hoped for!

There lay one germ of mischief ready to take root and bear evil fruit should occasion warrant; and worse than this, there was that haunting doubt which had harassed Eugénie ever since the words had been spoken,—"She never loved your husband, so it is not likely she will love you."

Was that true? Could it be true? If there had been no truth in it, how could the rumour have got abroad?"

Recollections of past times awoke in Eugénie's mind, half-forgotten stories and anecdotes, and reminiscences of boyish days. Lionel had sometimes, though not often, talked to his wife of his old home, but seldom of his mother. She could remember still how affectionately he spoke of the father he but dimly remembered, and of the brother with whom he corresponded regularly, though not frequently; but of his mother he seldom spoke, and that fact seemed significant now.

Why had she not loved him—she who could love so well?

What had her true-hearted, noble-souled Lionel done to merit coldness or contempt?

Was it because he had married against his mother's wishes, that she had cast him off?

It seemed to Eugénie that the coldness dated farther back than that.

Had she had the moral courage to put a straightforward question either to Sir John, or to Lady Durley herself, she might have been spared much pain; but at such a time as the present, it was all but impossible to mention Lionel's name; and to suggest the doubt as to whether or not he had been loved, seemed utterly out of the question.

In point of fact, Lady Durley had loved Lionel better than she had believed. He had been born when she was no longer a young woman, and when her cares for her delicate eldest boy engrossed the main part of her thoughts and energies, and the healthy, noisy child, who never gave her a day's anxiety, seemed in no way a part of her life. The very steadiness and sterling worth of his character rather seemed a stumbling-block towards the winning of his mother's heart. He passed through school, and then through Sandhurst so creditably and easily, that her anxieties on his account were never raised, and the umbrage she had taken at his imprudent early marriage had stood in the way of a better understanding, when the boy had developed into the man.

Thus it was true in one sense that Lady Durley had never greatly loved her younger son, and yet not true in the construction which Eugénie not unnaturally put upon such an assertion.

Now that she had lost him, Lady Durley mourned truly for her boy, and knew as she had never done before, how much he had really been to her, and how much she had relied upon his help and strength in the trials of the future. It was not indifference, but absorption, that had sealed the fountain of her affections all these long years ; and she had found this out too late.

She was ready to lavish upon Eugénie and her boy, all the love that had been withheld from Lionel. Eugénie was pining for a mother's love, and longing to lavish a daughter's devotion upon one whom her husband had loved (for he had loved his mother deeply) ; and yet a careless hand had opened that "little rift within the lute" and now its music was mute ; and two hearts were still sundered.





CHAPTER XXV.

GASCOIGNE'S BIRTHDAY.

THE twelfth of August was Gascoigne's fifth birthday. Anniversaries are quite as often sad as joyful, and Eugénie felt a distinct dread at the thought of the day which had hitherto been kept so happily.

Her own twenty-third birthday, which had passed but a week before had excited no remark, for no one was aware of it. It had been a sad day for the young widow—one of those days upon which a revelation of the utter loneliness of her life seemed forced upon her with greater significance than usual, and she had seemed to see her life stretching out before her in the dreary monotony of solitude, and to feel as she had never done before, the terrible loss she had sustained.

"I am so young to have come to an end of all that makes the happiness of this life," she had said half sadly, half bitterly. "How can I battle on by myself?—I who know so little, and have never learned to stand alone?"

But Eugénie had not learned her life's lesson in vain, and although she still had moments of great despond-

ency, she knew where to turn for help, her watchward was never forgotten :

"A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place ; as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

Those words had helped Eugénie through one sad time. Would they do so through the next ?

She was awakened that birthday morning, by the drumming of two strong little hands upon her sleeping face. Gascoigne still slept as often in her bed as in his own crib, in spite of Lady Durley's remonstrances. It was a comfort to the mother to feel that the child was near her.

"Chap's birfday ! Chap's birfday ! What's Mamsey got for me ?"

Eugénie opened her eyes to see a very bright, flushed face bending over her, and to hear a repetition of the eager exclamations.

She sat up, and held the child very close to her. Tears gathered in her eyes, which dropped by-and-by upon the curly head on her shoulder.

Gascoigne looked up quickly.

"Mamsey mustn't kye. It's my birfday."

"Darling, I know. I only cry because father is not here too."

Gascoigne looked up again, with the mystic gravity of childhood stamped upon his face.

"P'raps he is here," he said slowly. "P'raps he's in the room now. I *thinks* God would let him come to see us, on my birfday."

The child looked round with wide-open eyes, as if he half expected to see a vision. Eugénie held her peace, watching the rapt look upon the little face.

"Lily said she thought God let people come down out of Heaven sometimes. When they die He turns them into angels, you know, with great white wings, so that they can fly. *Mostly* they stay up there, flying about for God, but Lily says she's almost sure they're let come down sometimes to see the people they love. I think father would be *sure* to come and see me on my birthday."

Gascoigne spoke with unusual care and accuracy, much as if he were repeating words which he had heard several times. The month he had spent amongst elder children at Fontbury Park, had done much to develop his powers, and his devotion to Lily had been productive of a distinct access of thoughtfulness. He had always been a very quick, observant child, and he had acquired in one month ideas and thoughts which some children would hardly have caught in six.

"Lily says we don't see the angels when they come, but they see us. Let's ask God to let father come and see me on my birthday."

"Yes, darling, we will," answered Eugénie tenderly, "my little boy has not forgotten father?"

Gascoigne shook his head and pointed to the picture of Lionel Durley which hung over the fire-place.

"Gascoigne must try to remember father always; and to grow up to be like him. Mother has nobody now to comfort her and to take care of her, except her little boy."

"And God," said the child promptly, adding as if in proof of the words, "Lily said so."

Eugénie accepted the reproof in the same simple spirit in which it was offered.

"Yes, God will take care of us both, Gascoigne. We *must* never forget that."

"Grandy, too," added Gascoigne after a pause for consideration. "Grandy, too."

Eugénie made no reply.

"Chap likes Grandy," continued the boy at length in his quaint judicial way, as if summing up a case. "Chap likes Grandy, and Grandy likes Chap; and Grandy likes Mamsey; but Mamsey doesn't like Grandy."

"Gascoigne, dear," said Eugénie gently yet reprov- ingly, whilst the blood mounted suddenly in her pale face, "you should not say things like that. You do not know anything about it."

But Gascoigne was not easily put down.

"Chap knows," he said softly, yet determinedly. "Mamsey loves Uncle John; but Mamsey doesn't like Grandy."

There was no time for more to be said, for Gascoigne's nurse came at this moment to take the child; but Eugénie dressed that day in an unusually thoughtful mood, and prayed long and earnestly for grace and guidance, before she prepared to face the events of the day.

Gascoigne was to take his breakfast downstairs, in honour of the occasion. At least he was to sit at table and have some breakfast there, though his own bread and milk upstairs had been already disposed of.

Eugénie had made a change in his dress too, and he was attired, to his own unbounded pride and satisfaction, in a complete knicker-bocker suit of black cloth made in a semi-sailor fashion, open at the neck, disclosing the white shirt beneath. The style was very becoming to the boy, and Eugénie looked at him with fond pride, as he stood still to claim her admiration,

his face beaming and flushed beneath the wreath of clustering curls, his little figure drawn up to its fullest height.

"I'm a man, now," he said proudly. "I'm big enough to take care of Mamsey."

Eugénie smiled and patted the little hand she held, and asked,

"Does Gascoigne want to see mother's present?"

The eager look on the upturned face was answer enough; and Elton with a smiling face opened the door of the day nursery, into which Gascoigne rushed with a shout of triumph and delight.

A large new rocking-horse stood there, at which he made an ecstatic rush, and over whose charms a most engrossing ten minutes was spent.

As the child sat firmly in the saddle, swaying fearlessly to and fro, he looked up suddenly at his mother with the curiously wistful gaze of a thoughtful child, and said,

"Do *hope* God will let father come and see me now."

The sound of a distant gong announced that the breakfast below was ready, and Gascoigne dismounted with some reluctance, to accompany his mother downstairs. The hope of more surprises, and the desire to show off his new clothes, helped to wean him from his new possession. He slipped his hand within his mother's, and Ross, adorned with a bright ribbon, sedately followed.

"Many happy returns of the day, my little man," was Sir John's kindly greeting, as the child entered, conscious pride written in every line of his face; and he took Eugénie's hand, saying to her in a low voice,

"You have something left to comfort you, my dear. He is a boy to make glad a mother's heart."

"Yes, yes," answered Eugénie with some restrained emotion. "If only I can bring him up aright—to be a man such as his father—was."

Lady Durley was talking to Gascoigne, and displaying to his view a bright array of picture-books, which he surveyed with qualified pleasure. He had a sort of dim suspicion that a trap was laid for him in some mysterious fashion, within the brilliant covers, and between the many-hued pictures of these new gifts. The rocking-horse had been more to his taste, and Eugénie was pleased that it had been so.

Sir John had apparently nothing to offer, and Gascoigne, although he looked once or twice meaningly at his uncle from under his long eye-lashes, was too well-bred to utter any words indicative of surprise or hurt feeling. It was a relief to his mother that he evinced so much discretion, as she had an instinct that Lady Durley considered the boy's failings as her fault.

But a surprise was in store for both.

After prayers in the hall, which Gascoigne regularly attended, his cap and a new pair of gloves were mysteriously produced from the background, and his uncle taking his hand said smilingly,

"Let us go and stand at the front door, and see if anything is to be seen."

Gascoigne obeyed with alacrity, and said at once, "I hear a horse coming."

"Ah!" said Sir John, "Why here comes my groom, and whatever is he leading by that long rein?"

Gascoigne began to caper with excitement. The

mounted groom was leading by the long rein a diminutive, but very handsome little Shetland pony, saddled and bridled all ready for a small rider.

"Can you ride, old chap?" asked the uncle.

"Yes, yes!" shouted the boy, whilst his mother gently qualified this assertion by saying,

"Lionel did begin to teach him a little; gave him a ride sometimes before him, or borrowed a pony and taught him a little; but he has had no regular practice."

"It's never too early to learn, is it, Gascoigne?—especially for such a man as you are. Would you like a leg up now?"

The child was vociferous in his assent.

"He will be quite safe with George. He is used to teaching children; and the pony is perfectly quiet and docile. May he have a ride?"

"Oh yes," answered Eugénie gratefully. "You are very good to him, John."

"Is he mine?" questioned Gascoigne excitedly, as his mother lifted him upon his little steed. "Is he Chap's very own?"

"You must ask Uncle John," answered Eugénie. "I do not know."

Uncle John was watching the pair with smiling eyes, and his answer came before the question could be put.

"Yes, old chap, the pony is yours; so that you may be able to ride with mother when you are a little bigger. Mother's horse will carry a lady beautifully, and when you have learned to ride nicely, you must ask her if she will ride out with you, as my mother used to ride out with me, when I was a little boy."

The child was too eager to be off to wait for more. He grasped the little whip, which the groom held out to him, tightened his rein, and started his pony at a steady walk that soon broke into a trot.

Eugénie watched until the pair were out of sight, and then she turned gratefully to Sir John.

"You are very good to him."

"Poor little fellow, one feels that the father's place ought not to be left quite a blank. It seems sad to think of his future, brought up without a father's care, amid responsibilities of a grave kind. But a good mother can often take the place of both parents in a wonderful way."

"If only I can learn to be a good mother," said Eugénie sadly. "Oh John, I sometimes feel as if the responsibility is too terrible. You will help me, will you not? You know you are his guardian, too."

Sir John's face expressed much tenderness.

"My dear, I will help you so long as I am spared; but you know that my days are numbered."

She knew it, but still rebelled from the thought.

"It is too hard to lose you too. Ah John, do live for my sake and the child's! I am so young, so weak, so full of faults. How can I bring him up as I should? How can I teach him the duties of his position, when I do not know them myself?"

"My mother will best help you there, Eugénie. I trust she may be spared to you many years. You will not feel alone, or overmuch perplexed, whilst you can go to her for counsel and advice."

Eugénie's face changed somewhat.

"Your mother," she repeated slowly, "that is not the same thing at all."

"No," he answered with a smile, "it is much better. My mother has been my guide through life. It was she who trained me, and taught me my duties, and how to fulfil them. She will help you to do the same for the boy."

Eugénie was silenced. She tried to believe what she heard, tried to school herself to a due sense of her mother-in-law's excellent qualities; but she was conscious of a latent antagonism which she could not conquer, though she tried to hide it.

She went indoors by-and-by, and began mechanically to collect the books which lay strewn over the couch in the breakfast room. All traces of the meal had been removed, and Lady Durley sat at the table, looking over some of the house-books.

"Eugénie, my dear," she said quietly and kindly, "have you time to give me a few minutes' conversation?"

"Yes, certainly," was the answer; and Eugénie sat down, wondering within herself at her own dread and instinctive dislike of the unknown revelations to come.

"I wanted to ask if you have made any settled plan about the boy's education?"

"He is too young," Eugénie was beginning, but Lady Durley smiled and interposed—

"He is five years old to-day. Many children can read at that age. Your little boy, I fear, does not even know his letters."

Eugénie flushed a little with incipient indignation. She would not have resented such a remark from Sir John, for it was perfectly true, then why should she dislike it from his mother?

"I have tried to teach him ; but he is so volatile. He does not learn readily."

"So it would appear," answered Lady Durley not without dryness. "And yet he seems to me a peculiarly bright and observant child in other ways. I should have thought he would pick up learning very fast."

"It does not always follow," returned Eugénie, not caring to admit how very desultory had been her efforts at education.

"Perhaps not ; but still the question remains, how is he to be educated ? I suppose you will not put off any longer his mastering the rudiments of learning."

"He is very young," Eugénie began again, though more faintly, but her better judgment came to her aid, and she added,

"Yes, I suppose it is time he should begin. I will think the matter over and talk to John."

"John and I have already discussed the subject. We both think a daily governess would be the best. Short hours at first, growing longer with time."

"A governess !" echoed Eugénie dismayed. "Why of course I shall teach him myself."

"It does not seem, my dear, from the results already achieved, that the teaching of young children is exactly your forte."

Eugénie flushed indignantly, although the words were not unkindly spoken, or intended to convey a reproach.

"Indeed, Eugénie, you are not fit for the task ; a mother is seldom the best of teachers. She is apt to be over-anxious, or over-indulgent. You would not like your child to look upon you as an ogress, and his lesson hours will, of course, for some time to come, be the bane of his life. No, let a governess teach him, and you

be his play-fellow and friend. You would never stand against his entreaties, and I fear he would take liberties with you that he would not try with a stranger."

Eugénie felt herself vanquished. She knew that Lady Durley spoke the truth; but all that she could bring herself to say was,

"Well, we must think about it. He seems to me very young for a governess and serious education; but I will talk to John. I wish to act for the best."

"I am sure you do," answered Lady Durley kindly, "so sure that I am going to speak to you upon another point, where I think you are acting somewhat unwisely."

Eugénie said nothing, but looked at her mother-in-law with somewhat cold inquiry.

"It is about the liberty you give him to play and wander in the park, quite alone."

"Ross is always with him."

"Yes, and no doubt an intelligent dog is a great safeguard; but at the same time I think that his nurse should be with him as well."

"Gascoigne does not like his nurse always after him. I am with him a great deal; and he is perfectly safe with Ross."

"I am not sure that I agree with you."

"Why? What harm could happen to him?"

"I do not say that any harm is likely to happen, so long as he is content to remain in the park; but boys are boys, you know, my dear, and are all more or less imbued with the love of adventure. Some of these days you will find that the child will wander beyond the park, and then he might get into danger."

"He will never do that. He never disobeys me," answered Eugénie quickly.

"He is a good child—a very good child," returned Lady Durley quietly. "Yet children are mortal, even the best of them."

"But disobedience——"

"Disobedience, my dear, is of all others the most besetting sin. When we are quite convinced that we ourselves are entirely obedient in the ordering of our own lives, then it may be time to expect unfaltering obedience from our children—but surely not before."

Eugénie rose in subdued but visible irritation.

"Well, I suppose I cannot expect anyone else to understand my child as I do. I will think over what you have said about the governess; but I cannot see why his liberty need be infringed. I want to make a man of him, and Ross is his staunchest protector."

"Very well, my dear; have it your own way. He is your child; and you have the right to legislate for him."

And with that the interview ended.





CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. MASON'S STORY.

IT was not long before Eugénie availed herself of old Mr. Mason's permission, and took her little boy to see the Rookery.

She did not say anything to Sir John or Lady Durlley about the odd acquaintance she had made with the old man, for she had an instinct which warned her that he would not care for the matter to be openly talked of; but she thought a good deal of the lonely man, amid his flowers and his dogs, and felt as if she should like to see him again. Anyone who had been dear to Lionel in his youth, was doubly dear to her now.

There was no danger of finding Mr. Mason out.

She dismissed the carriage at a short distance from the gates, and taking Gascoigne by the hand, led him into the dim enclosure, which looked dark and cool after the hot sunshine without, and told him that an old friend of father's lived here, and that this had been Ross' first home.

The presence of Ross quickly attracted a crowd of dogs about them.

Mr. Mason's dogs were all excellently trained, and knew how to discriminate between a lawful and an

unlawful intruder. There was less noise than might have been expected; but the great creatures crowded round the guests without much ceremony, and in a fashion that would have terrified most small children.

Gascoigne, however, had a passion for animals, and particularly for dogs. He was delighted by the pack that pressed round them, talked to them, caressed them, encouraged them, and could hardly be persuaded to follow his mother towards the house, so engrossed was he by his gentle and friendly playfellows.

The dogs, of course, true to their nature, were perfectly docile and loving towards the little child who trusted them.

"A chip of the old block—eh?"

The sudden sound of a gruff voice made Eugénie start. The next moment Mr. Mason's spare figure emerged from the interior of a dark bower, cut out of a huge yew tree.

"I did not know you were so near," she said offering her hand. "You see I have taken advantage of your permission, and have brought my little boy to see your dogs."

"A chip of the old block—eh?" repeated the old man, his eyes still on Gascoigne; and Eugénie answered with some feeling,

"Indeed, I hope so."

The old misanthrope studied the child with a critical eye.

"A good face, madam, a good face and a good eye. Like his father—very like—but better looking. Takes after his mother, too. Plucky little chap. I like to see a child hold his own amongst a pack like that. Shows he has stuff in him. Call him here. I want to speak to him."

"Gascoigne, come here and speak to father's old friend." The child obeyed fearlessly; put out his small hand, and stared at this odd-looking old man.

"How do you do, sir?" he said slowly. "Are all these dogs yours?"

"Yes sir, every one."

"When I'm a man, I shall have just as many," pursued Gascoigne, looking very much in earnest. "I like your dogs. Ross was yours once, Mamsey says. He'll shake hands with you. Father taught him. Give paw, Ross. Does he know he lived here once?"

"Possibly; but hardly probably. Well, Ross is a very fine fellow anyway. Now you may go and play with the dogs, and I will talk to your mother. He can't get lost," he added to Eugénie, as the child turned and wandered contentedly away. "The walls are too high to climb, and the dogs will take care of him."

"I am not afraid," smiled Eugénie.

"Good. More boys are spoilt by over-coddling than by roughing it. I am glad you have kept your promise and brought the lad. I wanted to see your pretty face again."

Eugénie looked up and smiled. So old a man was allowed some freedom of speech.

"No news from Afghanistan, I suppose?"

"Nothing fresh. I do not suppose we shall ever have any real certainty."

"Ah! and you accept the worst, I see," he continued glancing at her dress.

"Have I any choice? All authorities unite in saying that hope is past now. If he had been living, we should have heard something before now."

"True, true. I suppose you would; and yet strange things have happened before now—chances of war, chances of war."

Eugénie shook her head sadly.

"In other days, perhaps; but war grows more deadly with every generation. I dare not hope. I can bear it now better than I once thought possible. I have learned to say 'Thy will be done,' even if I cannot say in my heart, 'It is well.'"

The old man nodded his head once or twice, as was his fashion when in thought.

"It will come, it will come," he muttered; and then changed the subject by saying,

"Now, sit down here in this comfortable seat, and tell me about your friends."

"What friends?"

"You know—the Beauchamps; I should say perhaps young Willoughby Beauchamp and Miss Seymour."

"You wanted to know whether or not they were engaged to be married, did you not?" began Eugénie slowly. "Well, they are not."

"Why not?"

Eugénie looked her interlocutor in the face, and half smiled.

"Is not that rather a curious question?"

"I don't know why it should be. I have heard that they are much attached to one another."

"I believe they are."

"Then why the—why on earth do they not get married?"

"Many people have to wait before they can do that, in these days."

"Yes, yes, I know; but the Beauchamps seem well-to-do people."

"I do not think Dr. Beauchamp has much. He is a younger son."

"But he has his practice."

"His practice is not a very paying one just now."

"But he could make it so, could he not? He need not give away so much of his time."

"He need not, of course; but I believe he does so on conscientious grounds. Dr. Beauchamp is a very good man, and very much in earnest. I do not think he could ever feel it right to give up his present labour of love, in order to add to his own personal happiness."

Mr. Mason stuck out his under lip and scowled.

"And what about the lady's happiness, pray?"

Eugénie answered with some spirit.

"That is a point which we need not discuss I think, Mr. Mason. I am sure you would not wish me to betray confidence."

"Quite so, quite so, just as I thought. You see, my dear madam, I know a good deal, although I do live such a hermit's life. I just imagined how things stood—both foolish young things wrapped up in one another, and he hanging back from a sense of duty. Sense of duty, indeed! Does he think it is his duty to break her heart, eh?"

"He does not know, I am sure," answered Eugénie seeing now that the old man had really a very good idea of the true state of the case. "I should think Willoughby Beauchamp would be the last man in the world to think himself attractive."

"Pooh! pooh! The lad's a fool to be so blind. He's a good lad enough, but an enthusiast; and

enthusiasts, even the best of them, are something of fools."

Eugénie was loyal enough to her friends to demur somewhat at this.

"But I tell you I know better," persisted the old man, cutting her short. "I've lived long enough to see how people and things turn out. That lad, if he married and settled down, would make an excellent man, liberal-minded, kind-hearted, humane and judicious. He will be a model physician if he marries—if not, he will become an impracticable enthusiast."

Eugénie was struck by the fact that Lucile, in her youthful, worldly-wisdom, and Mr. Mason, by the experiences of a long lifetime of observation, had both reached a similar conclusion about Willoughby.

"'It is not good for man to be alone.' You know whose words those are, madam? And I think they apply more fully to a very manlike, noble, earnest specimen of humanity, such as we judge Adam to have been, fresh from God's hands, than to the modern product of our enlightened civilisation. Willoughby Beauchamp is not a modern young man—he is an anachronism. He should have been born a dozen centuries or so earlier. He is the stuff of which leaders, reformers and martyrs are made. Put him into stirring times, and you would see how he would come to the fore. As it is, his life is not wide enough for his energies. He is doing noble work, but he wants room to expand. In point of fact, he wants some one to love."

"I am sure he loves Constance."

"So am I; and he should marry her. He is not a man to do things by halves. If he loves, he loves deeply; and I ask you, does it ever do a man any good

to fight against and kill a deep love—provided that the love is pure and right?”

Eugénie was silent.

“If he kills or smothers his love, it will harden him—it cannot do otherwise. His nature does not want that discipline. He is, if anything, too ascetic. He needs a softening influence, rather than severe self-denial. Does he ever appear to greater advantage than when with little children?”

“How do you know?” asked Eugénie amazed; but he went on without heeding—

“That is the fatherhood in his nature coming out. In his chivalrous feeling towards women, you can trace how good a husband he would make. Tell me, have our greatest men—no matter in what vocation—been married or single? History speaks for itself. Every rule has its exceptions; but the rule is plain: ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’”

“I believe you are right,” answered Eugénie, still wondering whither all this tended. She did not pause to smile at the tone adopted by a bachelor of ninety years; she knew that there was more to follow, and she could not but feel curious.

Mr. Mason looked at her, his wrinkled face expressing some covert amusement.

“I know you’re puzzled out of your life to know how it is that an old hermit like myself knows and cares so much about the Beauchamps.”

Eugénie admitted the truth of this surmise.

“You mustn’t suppose I have an equal insight into the affairs of the neighbourhood. I am not curious by nature; but I have an interest in the Beauchamp and Seymour families.”

“Yes?”

“Yes; and I will explain why. I am a very distant relation or connection of all these people; for one of their grandmothers—many generations back—had a sister who married a Mason, whose son I am, the last of my name and race.”

Eugénie did not trace the connection; but took it on trust.

“They have no Masons in their family tree,” she remarked presently, “for I have seen it.”

“No, so collateral a connection would not appear; and, indeed, if these people had not come to settle in this place, I should never have become aware of it; but their names revived some old associations in my mind, and I found out that we did possess a distant kinship one to another.”

“And then?”

“Well then I thought I should like to know more about them. I’ve been watching them pretty closely these past years—not that they have a notion of it—and I’ve pretty well taken their measure, I flatter myself.”

“I think you have.”

“I know what I’m about,” pursued the old man. “I’ve not lived all my life shut in behind my own walls, although I’m never so happy as in my own place with my dogs and flowers. So long as my old friends lived, I went about amongst them. I meant to build a nice house here; but one of those detestable strikes took the men off work when the walls were just up, and I vowed I’d never have another man about the place again. I got along so well with bare walls, and my old friends died off so fast, that it seemed no use finishing off a house, when I’d only myself to look at it.”

"Well?" asked Eugénie, as he paused again, with a far-away look in his eyes.

"Well, I was talking about my old friends wasn't I? how they all dropped off. Yes, yes, one by one, one by one, and I was left all alone, in my empty house and big garden."

"Were you lonely?" asked Eugénie. "Surely *you* could always make friends?"

He smiled in his odd way at the frank sincerity of her words.

"Perhaps, perhaps, but I had lost the wish. I felt myself an old foggy beside the young folks of the new generation. Your grandfather—your husband's grandfather, I should say—was one of the last to go, and I never knew his son, who did not live at the Castle till after his marriage with the present Lady Durley. I got into the way of never leaving my own place. My health at seventy was far less good than it is now. I stayed shut up within my high walls, and it is nearly twenty years since I have set foot outside of them. Habit, my dear madam, is second nature—it has grown to be almost first nature with me."

"And about the Beauchamps?" questioned Eugénie after a pause.

"Ah yes, the Beauchamps. When they came and settled here, and I made out that they were in a manner my own kindred, I began to think that they might, amongst them, help me out of a difficulty."

"A difficulty! I am sure Dr. Beauchamp would be glad to help anybody if he could."

Mr. Mason chuckled a little to himself.

"The difficulty, Mrs. Durley, of finding an heir."

"Oh!" said Eugénie and smiled.

"I am not a very wealthy man, you know, as wealth is accounted in these days; but this place is my own, and I have never lived at much expense. When a man has been living for seventy years, in possession of an income which he has never expended, his savings come to a tidy little fortune. In these days of radicalism and revolution, and upsetting of all old ways and established forms, no endowment is safe. I would rather leave what I have to leave to some good man or woman, who could be trusted to make a not altogether selfish use of it; and if it could make two people happy, instead of one—why so much the better. Do you really think it is only a lack of means that keeps those two apart?"

"I believe so," answered Eugénie, her face lighting.

"I am inclined to think so, too. Well, you see that difficulty might be tided over."

"Yes, if you really mean it."

"I do mean it. I have watched that family, every one of them, and they are all equally related to me, if such a distant connection is worth calling relationship. Francis Beauchamp is a good-natured, idle man with an ample fortune of his own, and a not ruinously large family. Lucile his wife is a flighty, vain and not over-estimable little woman, wrapped up in her own little cares and pleasures, and without any of the greater qualities one looks for in woman."

"You are hardly just to Lucile," pleaded Eugénie. "She has been a kind friend to me; and she is very sweet and lovable."

"Well, well, my dear madam, I have no wish to be unjust. Let us admit that she is all that is adorable. Still she is determined that I shall have no nearer

view of her charms, and she has almost announced the fact that she will have nothing to do with me."

Eugénie was silent.

"Ah, well, you admit so much? Very good; I am not one of those sweet-tempered men who like to lie and be kicked by a woman. My lady despises me, so my lady will not receive anything from me. That disposes of two you see. Now for the other two. I hear very much of the virtue of both; generosity to the poor, earnest and unselfish work, and that without any shirking of those duties which their social position requires from them."

He paused, and continued after a pause,

"That is a combination I like to see. I liked what I heard of those two, and when the time was ripe I sent for young Beauchamp, on some fool's pretence of wishing my life prolonged, and I studied him, and studied the young lady he by-and-by brought with him. I have seen them both more than once, and I think I have taken their measure. They certainly would both be better and happier as man and wife, than in the sort of cousinly bond that now exists between them."

"I think so," assented Eugénie.

"I am glad you do. I don't know much about women; but I do think that is one point upon which their instincts are seldom at fault. When I first saw you I said to myself, 'She has a womanly face; if I see my chance, I will take her opinion of my case. If she is a friend of the family, she will be in as good a position as anyone to judge.' You see I have found the chance. I am growing quite convivial under all these pressing claims. My man thinks I

am going off my head. He will think so still more shortly," and the old man rubbed his hands together and smiled to himself.

Eugénie looked at him inquiringly.

"No, madam," said old Mason, suddenly drawing himself up. "I have told you enough for to-day—more than I have ever told any other living soul. You will keep my secret?"

"Most faithfully."

"Keep it for a fortnight, and come here again, and I will tell you another. As you may, or may not, have brains to discover, (probably not), you are as yet only half enlightened as to my plans. Come to me in fourteen days and you shall know more. Now I must go to that boy and fill his pockets with plums. I have some splendid golden drops on one of my walls. Will you come too? Or are you above the joys of ripe fruit? No? That is well, we will go and find the child, as our excuse for gluttony."





CHAPTER XXVII.

MORE REVELATIONS.

THE fortnight sped away rapidly and uneventfully. Sir John seemed unusually well. Lady Durley, in spite of all warnings, could not but continue to hope on against hope, and Eugénie stood by, wondering how it would end, and doing her best to fill the place of a dutiful and submissive daughter.

To all outward appearances, a very complete mutual understanding existed between Lady Durley and her daughter-in-law. Eugénie had schooled herself, and her earnest wish to do right had helped her, and she had to a great extent conquered those feelings which had prompted rebellious words and a distant manner. Very slowly—almost imperceptibly, the two women were drawing nearer together, but the “little rift within the lute” had not yet been healed, and the music could not but be mute, although many attempts were made to conjure it up.

Eugénie’s visit to old Mr. Mason gave her ample food for thought. She was curious to know what his plans could be. He evidently intended to leave his money to Constance and Willoughby, to enable them

to marry; but as he was in such good health, they might have many years still to wait, and what was the use of raising hopes, which would have to wait indefinitely for their realisation?

And yet the old man had been wonderfully intent upon this plan—so intent, that it hardly seemed possible he meant to let matters remain in their present state until his death. Few men would take such unfeigned satisfaction in a scheme which could only be put into execution upon their decease, and yet Mr. Mason could hardly believe that Dr. Beauchamp would marry upon expectations grounded upon the whim of an eccentric old man.

Altogether Eugénie was puzzled and interested, and awaited with some impatience the expiration of the required fortnight.

She went alone the next time, and was met as before, by her host in the garden.

“Good,” he said. “I expected you; though women never are to be depended on. Is it curiosity or a business-like mind that makes you so punctual?”

“Both, I hope,” answered Eugénie with a smile. “I must admit that I am somewhat curious, and I hope I am learning to be business-like. Women always like secrets you know, Mr. Mason.”

“Don’t try to mimic me, if you please, madam, as you will only make a lamentable failure of it. Now tell me, have you ever heard what the interior of my house is like?”

Eugénie smiled.

“Rather curious, I believe; bare walls, no staircase, no kitchen, no bedrooms; a sort of camping household, very gipsy-like, only within walls instead of canvas.”

The old man slowly nodded his head.

"That's about it, and very comfortable it is, when once you get used to it. It saves half the bothers of life. Well, Mrs. Durley, will you come and see my *ménage* now?"

"With pleasure," answered Eugénie.

They approached the house together, and she became at once aware that some subtle, indescribable change had passed over it. The windows all shone with a new brightness, no broken glass was visible anywhere, and the look of neglect had mysteriously vanished. When they reached the door beneath the quaint porch—behold, the old battered, unpainted deal was replaced by an ancient door of solid oak, studded with plates of brass and ornamental work, such as we never see in these modern days.

Silent and amazed, Eugénie followed her conductor into the house, and once within the threshold she stopped short, and uttered an exclamation of delight and astonishment.

"Mr. Mason!" she cried, "what have you done?"

She found herself in a large hall, the floor of which was of exquisite parquetry work, the windows of deep-hued stained glass. A massive oak staircase, with handsome carved oak balustrade, led to the floor above, and black oak doors with heavy architraves, opened from the hall into the different rooms which branched from it.

Eugénie had seldom seen a private house of so stately an appearance. Her companion watched her with an amused expression upon his wrinkled face.

"Ah, I see how it is. Because I have elected to live like a hermit, people choose to think that I am a Goth

and a Vandal. I assure you, madam, I am a man of very fine taste and considerable knowledge. When I do a thing, I do it well."

"You do," answered Eugénie with emphasis, "but you have had so little time. How has it all been done? It is like magic."

"Everything in these days is a question of money," answered the old man thoughtfully, stroking his chin. "Forty years was Solomon's temple in building—was it not? I suppose a modern contractor would have it up in as many weeks. Forty years of steady, reverent, prayerful work; forty weeks of bustle, hurry, scamping and swearing. Ah yes! the spirit of the times, the spirit of the times!"

But Eugénie's curiosity was still unsatisfied.

"Tell me how you did it," she pleaded.

"Did it!" he repeated, "why, how should I do it, but by ordering and paying, and bargaining for speed. I kept the men up to their business—you may make your mind easy there—they heard a few home truths before they left!"

"What a beautiful old staircase!"

"Yes, I bought that thirty years ago, and the doors too, when Tudor House was pulled down. I was building then, and thought they would just suit my house. They've been lying by all that time; but they don't look any the worse now that they are up, and polished to the requisite state of brilliance. Plenty of elbow grease there, I can tell you. I made the lazy chaps work!"

"And may I go on now? May I see the rooms?"

"To be sure; come this way. Except for my own den there, you will find things highly respectable. My man is in the last stages of depression."

Eugénie smiled. She was thoroughly aroused and interested by all she saw, though not quite clear as to the bearings of the case.

"This is the drawing-room of the future," remarked Mr. Mason opening one door. "It is not furnished yet, none of the rooms are furnished; but, as you see, it is all ready for the harpies—upholsterers, *artistes*, whatever you like to call them. I have not yet decided what style to adopt."

Drawing-room, dining-room, and library were all much in the same condition, the polished floors, panelled walls, and handsome fire-places giving an air of antique solemnity to the spacious apartments, which greatly delighted Eugénie.

"The upstairs rooms are all ready too; but they are not worth a visit—nothing out of the way in them. Well, I see you approve the changes—appreciate them more than I do myself. The kitchens are more to my taste—bare and unpretending; but of course I am no authority now. Come into this den of mine, Mrs. Durley. I want to talk to you; but I can't do it in the midst of this blank order and desolation."

"If it is desolate in your eyes, why did you have it done?"

"If you did not talk so fast, and would let me get a word in edgewise, I should perhaps be able to enlighten you," snapped the old man.

Eugénie could not but smile, at hearing her quiet comments so designated. She followed her host into a huge bare place (half room, half vestibule) which opened from the hall, and looked about her curiously. A strange litter of the most miscellaneous description lay promiscuously around. Pictures, statuary, wax-medal-

lions, in various stages of completion, books and papers, tools of every kind, as well as household articles in the shape of plates, dishes, glasses and bottles, all jostled one another for space, and covered alike chairs and tables and the greater part of the floor. A pallet bed stood in one corner, and there were two chairs, not heaped with litter, into one of which Mr. Mason sank, motioning Eugénie to take the other.

"Ah," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "in a room like this, one can feel comfortable!"

"Then why have you taken so much pains to make the rest of your house uncomfortable?"

"Because I am a fool, my dear madam, a fool with a new craze. Of all delusions in this wide world, not one is so hopelessly idiotic as the one which tries to make other people happy in your own way."

Eugénie began to hazard a guess at the explanation of what she had seen.

"You are thinking of Constance Seymour and Dr. Beauchamp I suppose?"

"Do you think they would be willing to live here and take care of an old man? I can't expect always to be well. I shall break down some of these days, and be an old cripple or idiot, or something nice and attractive. Do you think a prospect of so much disagreeable work—for I shall be a horrid patient to nurse when my time comes—would be a sufficient attraction for two such very enthusiastic and self-sacrificing people as they?"

"I hardly know what to say," answered Eugénie. "I doubt whether they would see the self-sacrifice involved," and she smiled a little.

"Oh, I'll take care of that. I have a peculiar talent

for making myself disagreeable. I can make both of their lives a burden to them with the greatest ease, if that will be an inducement."

"I am not sure that it would. Constance has a particularly happy disposition. I do not think that either she or Willoughby have any great wish to make themselves miserable."

The old man chuckled, but then his face took a more serious look, and he said with an almost pathetic simplicity—

"Do you think they would come and take care of me, even if I were not a great cripple? I have nobody to call my own. They have no parents to care for. Why should we not care for one another?"

"Why not indeed? I should think either of them would be glad to do what they could."

Engénie felt a little diffident in expressing an opinion. Her own ideas were not conventional, and she could not see why Constance and Willoughby should not grant their old kinsman's request, and watch over his declining years, and be as his son and daughter; but she was aware that the world was apt to look coldly upon any scheme that did not follow the fixed rules of daily life.

"I do not want either, I want both," returned the old man quickly. "I can only put up with a steady married couple. I should not be in their way. I have this old place of my own, where I shall live. I should not be much in their way, but I should like to feel that they were about the place; that I could have company when I chose. And when I am ill—and I begin to suffer sadly in the winter from rheumatism—then there will always be a doctor on the spot—and no bill to

pay—and a daughter to wait upon one, and take all the scoldings. I must have someone to scold when the twinges come, and my man answers me back and irritates me. I don't choose to be irritated. It affects my nerves. Constance never would dream of such a thing."

It seemed as if he could not quite separate jest from earnest. Eugénie was building airy castles, wondering if they would ever be realised.

"Do you think they will come?" asked Mr. Mason with a certain eagerness in face and voice.

"I really hardly know what to say. I cannot see why they should not. But what about Dr. Beauchamp's patients and his practice?"

"He will go on just as usual. You don't suppose I want an idle man, kicking his heels over the place all day? He can go his rounds, and poke round over his beloved drains as much as ever he chooses. I don't want to stop him! He has his surgery and dispensary in the town, and he can keep it on, and his assistant will live there as at present. Any sudden summons at night, or when he is at home, must of course come here. I shall put up a special door and bell for the purpose, and there must be a lad to attend to all such business. I can't see any difficulty in his changing his quarters. Can you?"

"No, you seem to have provided for everything; but—but—" here Eugénie paused.

"Well what?—out with it!"

"Why did you not ask him, speak to them first, before you spent so much over the house, and took such a great deal of trouble? It would be such a pity, you know, if it all came to nothing."

"You're a pretty Job's comforter," remarked the old man with a snort of disapprobation.

"One must think, you know, Mr. Mason," pleaded Eugénie in self-defence.

"Think indeed! Women don't know how! I suppose you think I'm an old fool for my pains; but I tell you I am not; and I always do things my own way, and I always will."

"I am sure of it."

"You are, are you? Is that meant for impudence? Well, the matter stands thus—I am going in any case to leave this place and a thousand a year to young Beauchamp, and settle five hundred a year upon Miss Seymour on her marriage. I can't with any decency leave a shell of a house, so as life is short I have had it put in order now. I don't prefer for people to be living in a constant state of eagerness for my death, so I shall ask the lad to take immediate possession. I shall thus rid myself of all trouble, save a doctor's bill, secure the services of a very good nurse gratis, and settle down to a comfortable, lazy old age, and may even in the end contrive to cheat Government of legacy duty by making over the whole burden of my affairs in my lifetime."

"I see," said Eugénie slowly, "and I suppose that your motives in this are purely selfish?"

"Purely. They always are. When you have lived ninety years, my dear madam, you will learn that self is the only thing worth thinking about. It is a great mistake to consider others—you get no gratitude, only abuse for it—but one does learn to appreciate oneself, after a long course of study."

"I see," said Eugénie again.

After a pause, the old man said suddenly,

"And now to business. I want your advice as to the furnishing of those rooms. I don't know how to set about that point, and I don't approve of trusting to a counter-jumper's taste. He'll bring you every kind of fandangle from India, Africa, Japan and Venice, and then tell you your rooms are 'perfect Early English.' I know just what their ideas are. I want some sensible woman's opinion, who knows what she's about."

"I have so little experience," answered Eugénie, "I have lived so much abroad. I know whom I should take into my confidence, if I were you."

"Who is that?"

"Constance herself."

"Humph!"

Eugénie's face lighted suddenly, and she went on speaking in her quiet way,

"I should tell Willoughby or Constance that a young married couple—kinsfolk of yours, were coming to live with you. They would be surprised, but of course would not have the faintest suspicion. I should say that you wanted help in the matter of doing up and furnishing the house, and ask for their advice and assistance. Then you would get to know their tastes; and I suppose that is what you want."


The old man sat in silence for some minutes, and then he nodded his head several times.

"Women are some use after all," he muttered at last. "I think I will take your advice, Mrs. Durley."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

EUGÉNIE'S VICTORY.

LD Mr. Mason's scheme for the benefit of Constance and Willoughby did much for Eugénie, in so far as it took her out of herself.

Eugénie had matured rapidly during these past weeks. Sometimes when she looked back upon her former self, she felt as though she had actually passed into a new stage of existence.

Trouble is a great master; and Eugénie had had much to learn from him during the present year.

When first the wave of sorrow had swept over her, it had seemed to leave nothing but blank desolation behind. Then the love of God had entered the empty heart, and the wilderness had blossomed like the rose.

After that blessed time of consolation, had come the inevitable moments of discouragement, when she had found, as all must find, how hard a thing it is to realise the ideal we have set up for ourselves. Many slips, many disappointments, many moments of discouragement Eugénie had had to meet and face; but in spite of all these, she was making progress day by day, and was learning more and more how God's Spirit is never withheld from those who earnestly seek His guidance.

Eugénie spoke the truth when she had said that she had learned to say from her heart, "Thy will be done." She had conquered herself, had taken up in meekness and submission the cross laid upon her, and had learned to be resigned and to murmur no more.

But although she had learned this great lesson, it seemed to her at this time as if all of power of enjoyment had passed out of her life. Her boy was her only source of comfort, for him she would live; and in time, when her great grief was long gone by, perhaps she would even experience once more those old sensations of interest and pleasure which now seemed a thing of the past, so far as she herself was concerned.

Her own life looked blank and colourless, and Eugénie turned resolutely away from the contemplation of a future from which she could not but shrink.

But if her own future looked dark, surely she could find food for meditation in other channels. The battle with self had not been fought in vain, and Eugénie was now reaping her reward. In the joys and sorrows of others she was living her life anew, and finding, as all must find, that the wider our range of sympathy extends, so does our capacity for happiness.

It seemed as if Eugénie were living her own life over again, in sympathy with Constance Seymour.

Gratitude was an instinct of her nature which she never lost or put aside; and it seemed to her as if she owed an immense debt of gratitude both to Constance and to Willoughby.

Had she been asked to explain what they had done for her, beyond evincing an ordinary kindness, she might not have found the task an easy one; and yet she was perfectly aware that it was to their influence

that she owed the peace of mind which she had found.

They had not talked much to her upon religious themes. They had not urged upon her any doctrine, any course of action, anything new or strange. But there are people whose earnestness expresses itself without the medium of words, people whose lives seem to be a sermon more eloquent than any that we hear from a pulpit, and to this class of earnest workers did Constance and Willoughby belong.

Faults they might have, blunders they might make (which of us do not?), but an earnest purpose was before their eyes, a living faith in their hearts. They took their lives and their talents as a loan from God, to be spent in His service and to His glory.

All this Eugénie had felt, without being able to express. She loved Constance, and revered both deeply and truly; and it seemed to her that two such lives only wanted the consummation of unity to give them a power and beauty which would enable them to do an untold amount of good to all who crossed their path.

Thus it was that Mr. Mason's generous and eccentric scheme stirred her nature, and appealed to her sympathy to a remarkable extent. She longed for the realisation of the dream. What a happy home that lonely house would be! And what a transformation scene! The old man would be so happy, as well she knew, surrounded by "family ties," however distant the kinship might be; and as for Constance and Willoughby, their married life would leave nothing to be desired. Eugénie sometimes sighed at the picture her fancy drew. It seemed at such moments as though she had never valued her own happiness during the five bright years of her

married life. Had she but known how soon she was to lose her husband, how she would have valued that time!

But Eugénie did not waste her time in idle regrets; and she had other interest around her, besides those of these friends.

Sir John was learning to depend more and more upon his "secretary"; and now a large portion of the business connected with the estate passed through her hands and was practically settled by her.

It was arranged so gradually that Eugénie was a long time taking in the real significance of what was being done. For many months she was only conscious of acting as an amanuensis; and even when she began to find that she was able to understand the subjects, and to compose the letters herself, it never occurred to her that her brother-in-law had taken needless pains to enlighten her upon each subject as it came up.

Perhaps it never would have dawned upon her that there was a definite purpose in all this, had not Sir John himself enlightened her.

He had been growing gradually weaker during the past weeks. The pain did not return; but the spurious strength which its cessation had seemed to give, had now passed away, and he was extremely feeble—unfit for any exertion save of the quietest nature.

He often remained upstairs till mid-day now; and when he did so, Eugénie went through the morning's business and correspondence alone; leaving only such matters as were beyond her comprehension to be settled when he should appear.

She had been hard at work for a couple of hours on this particular day, and Sir John found her still in his study when he came down.

"I am afraid, my dear, I leave you an unconscionable amount of work to do now-a-days. You are quite spoiling me."

"I am getting so clever, you see," answered Eugénie with a smile. "I have done everything this morning; and there is nothing for you to do but to sign a few cheques. I am getting quite a business woman."

"Yes, my dear, you are," he answered with a look of satisfaction. "I think it will make the future all the plainer for you. You have not learned your lesson very much too soon."

"Don't!" said Eugénie quickly, with a look of pain. "You know I never meant that."

"No, but I mean it. I have meant it all along. I knew it was necessary that you should understand the management of the property."

Eugénie looked distressed but said nothing.

"My dear," he said gently, "I do not want to disturb you; but there are a few things I want you to know, and a point or two I wish to discuss with you."

"Yes?"

"I think you ought to know exactly how matters will stand—when I am gone."

"No doubt you know best."

"Yes. I shall not leave you any the sooner for telling you these things, and it is easier to me, as you know, to speak than to write."

"Oh yes, I will hear it all. I do not like to think of it, but I will."

"Thank you. Gascoigne, as you know, will succeed to the baronetcy at my death, and my mother will see that the title is accorded to you. You should be Lady

Durley then you know, and a few formalities will set that point right. We are not a very wealthy family, Eugénie, but only sons have kept the money with the title for the most part. Six thousand a year is the income the boy will have, less a thousand a year chargeable on the estate, which is to be paid to my mother. And she, as I think you know, has the right left by my father's will, to live here for the remainder of her lifetime."

"Of course," assented Eugénie.

"A thousand a year is also secured to you from the estate, so long as you remain unmarried—pardon me, Eugénie, I have no wish to pain you; but business is business. Should you marry again, the sum of five thousand will be paid down to you in lieu of farther charges, and you will, of course, retain the fifteen thousand which came to you on Lionel's death."

Eugénie bent her head in a mute assent which she had not voice to express.

"That matter being done with, we will return to our former subject—the boy. A long minority will make a wealthier man of him than his ancestors have been. I have spent large sums upon the estate during my quiet reign. I believe you will find everything in such order and repair that no great outlay will be required at any time, so long as a careful survey is kept up. The bailiff is thoroughly trustworthy, and a man in the prime of life. He will most likely stay on throughout your tenure of office, and will spare you much trouble. Money will accumulate during the next years. God grant that the boy may grow up to make a right and wise use of the gifts entrusted to him."

"Amen!" breathed Eugénie fervently. "Ah John!

it is a terrible responsibility—the training up of my boy—and I have no one to help me ! ”

Sir John was silent for awhile. He seemed to have something on his mind, which he found difficult to put into words.

“Eugénie,” he said at last, “I wished to speak to you upon that very point.”

“Which ? ”

“I mean the guardianship of the boy.”

“Yes ? ”

“You know that as matters stand at present, you and I are the guardians ? ”

“Yes.”

“And that when I die, you will be left alone to the task ? ”

“I suppose so.”

“And the sole guardianship of a boy in Gascoigne’s position is a great responsibility.”

“Indeed, yes,” and Eugénie sighed, “nobody is more aware of that than I am.”

“You shrink from the task ? ”

“Not exactly,” she answered bravely, “I will not allow myself to do that. My child is very dear to me, and I would give my life to serve him. I wish to do all I can to make him what he should be ; but of course I know that sole guardianship is a heavy responsibility, and I wish it had not fallen to my lot, so young and untried as I am in this new life. Still, as there is no alternative, I mean to face the task bravely, and trust in God to help me.”

“He will do, you may be sure,” answered Sir John quietly ; and then after a few moments of silence and hesitation he added,

"But there is an alternative, you know."

The tone made her look up quickly.

"What is that?"

"I could appoint a successor, who would share the guardianship with you."

"Ah!"

What might be the meaning of that ejaculation Sir John could not gather.

"Of course I should not venture to take such a step without your approval."

"But you think the step advisable?"

"Well—yes. You have yourself quoted my own arguments. You are young and inexperienced in this kind of life, and sole guardianship is a great responsibility."

Eugénie was silent for some minutes, and then she asked slowly,

"Have you anyone in your mind whom you wish to appoint?"

"Well—yes, my dear."

"Whom?"

"My mother."

After a short silence Eugénie said quietly,—

"Yes I see—but John, is it not rather unusual to appoint a grandparent as guardian to a young child?"

"I should think it probable; but the present case is exceptional."

"It seems to me," said Eugénie again, "that at the time I most need help with Gascoigne, your mother—might be—"

"Dead," suggested Sir John.

"Or too infirm to be able to direct his education."

"I do not think so," answered Sir John. "I have given the matter careful consideration. My mother is

sixty-five. She comes of a long-lived race. Both her parents lived to be over eighty, and both retained their faculties to the day of their death. My mother is stronger now than many women in their first youth. Old age has not told upon her nor impaired her strength. Her anxiety for me has been the only influence under which she has suffered. When that is removed, and the shock over, I believe she will live to a peaceful old age, as her forefathers have done."

Still Eugénie did not speak, and Sir John continued his discourse in a dreamy voice.

"My poor mother! Such a tender, loving mother she has been to me! No one understands her as I do. I think no one could, for she does not do herself justice. My dear mother!—the only thing I shrink from in this parting, is the blank that I shall leave in her life. If I could do anything to fill that blank, it would be such a comfort. What could better fill it than the care of a child, who is to be trained to fill my vacant place? Who could be found more fit for the task than one, who had had such wide experience of its duties? My mother, Eugénie, has lived for forty years and more at Linley. She knows more about the place than anyone. I do not speak of the business of the estate—that has not been her province, and you have learned it, and are the right person to execute it; but in knowledge of all that is fitting for the fulfilment of the position we hold, or should hold in the county, there is nobody to match my mother."

A struggle had gone on all this time in Eugénie's mind. An impulse had come over her to say, "The child is mine, entrusted to my care by his father. Nobody shall share that trust."

The old antagonism against her mother-in-law once more reared up its head. The old jealousy of her influence over her child reasserted itself; and Lucile's foolish words of warning flashed into her mind.

It was upon the tip of her tongue to say that she could never consent to such an arrangement; but she checked the impulse and remained silent. And whilst he was pleading his mother's cause, Eugénie had fought out the battle in her own heart, and had triumphed.

"John," she said gently, "you are quite right. Your mother ought to be guardian in your place. Let it be so, please."

His face lightened with pleasure.

"You will really permit it?"

Eugénie smiled a little.

"Have I the power to prevent it?"

"I should not dream of taking the step without your approval."

"And now you have that."

He looked at her keenly.

"I wish I could read your thoughts. I do not wish to ask a sacrifice of you."

Eugénie possessed that nobility of nature which, when a sacrifice is made, makes it gladly and generously, without one thought of regret.

"John," she said, in the imperious way she sometimes playfully adopted towards him. "It is not your doing at all; but mine. You placed the matter in my hands, and I have decided. Let your mother's name be included among Gascoigne's guardians. I wish it."

Eugénie felt, after that interview, a sense of subdued happiness, and a kind of tenderness towards Lady Durley, which were alike strange and new.

She was quite as reserved, perhaps a little more so, when they met again later in the day, than was usual, and yet she felt as though she had never loved or understood her mother-in-law so well.

When they parted at night, Lady Durley said in her kindly, stately way—

“John has been telling me of your talk this morning, my dear. It is like him and like you. I am much obliged for your confidence, Eugénie. It shall not be abused.”

Eugénie flushed to the roots of her hair.

“Indeed, Lady Durley, the obligation is on my side,” she said hurriedly and nervously. “I know you will help me ; and I shall sorely need help.”

“We shall both need help, my dear,” was the quiet answer. “Perhaps we may help one another.”

No more was said that night ; yet Eugénie sought her room with a strangely lightened heart.





CHAPTER XXIX.

EUGÉNIE COUNSELS WILLOUGHBY.

EUGÉNIE had stipulated to be present when old Mr. Mason first showed his newly restored house to Constance and Willoughby, and told them of the “young kinsfolk” who were to share his home.

They all met there by appointment, on a given afternoon, not many days after Eugénie had been taken into the old man’s confidence.

It seemed to the young widow as if she were living, in loving sympathy with her friend, the days of her romance over again. She was beginning to learn that in the joys and sorrows of others, balm is to be found to heal the wounded spirit, and bind up the bleeding heart. Eugénie was learning to forget herself and to think and feel for others.

Since that day, now some weeks past, when she had surprised Constance’s secret and drawn from her a tacit avowal of her love, the two had drawn very closely together. Lady Durley had raised no further barrier against Eugénie’s intimacy with her friends at Fontbury Park; and since Constance had become a frequent visitor at Linley Castle, she had won her way

in the estimation of its mistress, in a way which was a source of unmingled pleasure to Eugénie.

They drove and walked together, visited the sick and poor, and brought help and comfort to many a toil-worn body and sin-laden soul; and Lady Durley raised no obstacle in Eugénie's path; but asked with interest after her humble friends, and sometimes gave substantial aid when some tale of real distress reached her ears. Slowly yet surely lessons of mutual forbearance and tolerance were being learned on both sides; and two sorrowful hearts—one young and one old, were unconsciously drawing ever nearer together.

Eugénie had kept the secret faithfully. Not one faint suspicion had she roused in Constance's mind of the curious interest which old Mason took in her and in her cousin. To lookers-on, it seemed as if Eugénie and her child were the sole objects of his notice; and the neighbourhood began vaguely to speculate as to the cause of the sudden access of sociability in the habits of the aged recluse.

That he should actually have a London contractor down to complete, secretly and rapidly, his long unfinished house, was a matter of profound astonishment to the few who had heard the news.

This rumour, however, had not reached Fontbury Park, and Constance and Willoughby were quite ignorant of what had taken place. They had several times been inside the bare shell of the house during the past weeks, and had smiled over the utter desolation and disorder which seemed so dear to the heart of the eccentric old man.

And now they stood absolutely aghast and speechless to see the change that had been wrought there.

Their host seemed vastly to enjoy this bewilderment, although he affected to be ignorant of it, and led the way through the handsome rooms with an air of critical indifference.

"Mr. Mason," exclaimed Constance at last, "it is most wonderfully beautiful. I cannot believe my eyes. How have you done it—and why?"

"Because I am an old fool, and don't know when I am well off," growled the old man, with an odd twinkle in his eye.

"You have converted a barn into a mediæval manor-house," remarked Willoughby with honest appreciation in face and voice. "The only room for regret is that you have not enjoyed the pleasure and comfort of it during these past years."

"I enjoy it! I find comfort in it!" echoed the old man with a grim chuckle. "You don't suppose I care about all this tomfoolery—carved oak, stained glass and slippery floors? Not I! I know better. I know what real comfort is. Do you think I mean to live in these sort of places? No thank you! Here is my sanctum. Here I mean to live and die. At ninety, we do not change our ways to suit the fashion of the times," and he flung open the door of his great bare hall, and showed the desolate confusion within. "There, that is my ideal of comfort."

Constance and Willoughby looked at him, and at one another, in increasing bewilderment.

"But Mr. Mason, if you do not like the change in the house, and do not mean to profit by it, why have you taken all the trouble and expense of doing up the rooms in this magnificent fashion?"

"Because, as I said before, I'm an old fool, and don't

know when I am well off. After living alone in perfect peace for seventy years, I must needs go make my life a burden by the charge of a pair of young idiots, who are nothing to me, but to whom I have rashly opened my doors in an unguarded moment of weakness."

They looked at him in increasing astonishment.

"Do you mean you are going to have some relatives of yours to live here?"

"Yes, I just do mean that—a newly-married couple, who will come in for what I have to leave when I depart this life. As you, young sir, who call yourself a doctor, decline to guarantee me the stipulated ten years of life that I crave, I must needs take my steps accordingly. I hate the present Government—a low, radical revolutionary lot—and I don't mean them to fatten on the legacy duty of my property. I mean to make over some of it to this young couple in my lifetime, and I want to see what sort of people they are. The young fellow can carry on his work just as well in this house as anywhere else—I'll take pretty good care he isn't idle—and she can look after me when I begin to fail—Oh yes, I'll have my money's worth out of them, never fear! They will have the house, and I shall have my den and my garden. I dare say I shall soon hardly know the difference they will make. I shall go my way and they theirs. You must come and see how the ménage works, Miss Seymour, when we start operations."

"I will indeed," she answered smiling, "I feel curious already."

"When does the new régime begin?" asked Willoughby.

"As soon as I can get things into order; but the house must be furnished first. I don't know anything about such things. I appealed to Mrs. Durley; but she declared herself incompetent, and referred me to you. Miss Seymour, you are my last hope—you and Dr. Beauchamp. You cannot have forgotten your experiences when your cousins moved to Fontbury Park. Let me have the benefit of them."

"Why don't you go to the newly-married pair for advice?" asked Willoughby. "It seems to me that they are the people most concerned."

"Who asked you for your opinion?" snapped old Mason, "I suppose I know what I am about? Did you ever meet a newly-married couple yet, who were not so deeply sunk in idiocy as to be absolutely incapable of a sane opinion? What's the use to me of all the newly-married couples in the world, fooling round in Switzerland? Go along with you, I see *you're* no good. Miss Seymour, favour me by coming into my den with me. I have innumerable catalogues and lists there. Out of the chaos, we may be able to make out an exhaustive list of what is needed."

Constance was carried off without further ado.

Eugénie and Willoughby turned smilingly away, and went out into the garden.

"What an odd idea to develop in his brain!" said Willoughby reflectively.

"Very."

"Are you in his confidence altogether?"

"He told me a few days ago."

"You don't know these people of course?"

"I believe they are only distant connections—not particularly well-to-do in the world."

“And this Quixotic scheme is really to help them. Just like the old fellow. I believe there is more real self-denial in him, than in half the philanthropists of the day. An upsetting of one’s daily life is no light sacrifice.”

“I do not think it will be really a great sacrifice,” answered Eugénie. “From what he has told me of his life, I do not think that solitude and exclusiveness are really so much to his mind as he leads people to believe. His old friends died, and he grew into the lonely life he leads; but I often think he craves for more companionship from his fellow-men. I believe this plan of his has given him great pleasure.”

“Perhaps you are right. I have sometimes fancied the same. I hope they will make him happy this newly-married pair. Ah! he is a fortunate man that young fellow. We do not all get such chances.”

Willoughby’s face put on a somewhat longing look. She knew he was thinking of Constance.

An odd sort of intimacy existed between Eugénie and the young doctor, one of those inexplicable mutual understandings which are met with from time to time, generally where one would least expect it. From the first hour of their acquaintance Willoughby had felt a peculiar interest in, and sympathy for, Eugénie, and had spoken to her with unconventional directness of purpose: and she on her side, had accepted without any sense of surprise the line he had adopted, for she understood him intuitively, and instinct told her she might trust him without one doubt.

He had helped her many a time in her hour of need. Sometimes she traced back to words of his, the first

feeble growth of her spiritual life. She was grateful to him, she revered and respected him, and she knew he was her friend, and a friend who would prove himself if need be, worthy the name.

Eugénie was grateful to Willoughby, and would gladly serve him if she knew how. She revered his noble nature, and yet it seemed to her to have one flaw. No one, particularly no woman, likes to find a flaw of any kind in one whom she is half inclined to idealise. Eugénie could not understand how Willoughby could love Constance, as he undoubtedly did, and not know how truly she loved him in return.

The odd intimacy just alluded to give her an insight into the thoughts that were passing through his mind. She spoke with the impulse of a thought, that rose almost unconsciously to her lips.

“Ah, why do you not marry too?”

He started and looked at her; but he did not appear to resent the question.

He sighed and looked thoughtfully before him.

“I have to choose between love and duty—and—I think—I have chosen duty.”

“You think?”

“Yes. Sometimes I am terribly tempted to fight the battle over again; but I cannot think it can be right to yield up the palm of victory—a victory so hardly won. Our lives are not given us solely for our own use; but in trust.”

“In trust for what?”

“For the benefit of others.”

“Explain what you mean by ‘benefit.’”

He looked at her with a smile. He was aware that Eugénie had developed rapidly of late; but he was

conscious to-day of a greater depth and power in the face before him than he had ever known before.

"I mean the good, the happiness—" he paused, finding it difficult to put his meaning into words.

A great wish was rising in Eugénie's heart—the wish that Willoughby's declaration of love to Constance should not hinge entirely upon Mr. Mason's scheme for their benefit. With a woman's fine instinct, she knew with absolute certainty that the poetry of a deep love would be lost or hidden, if all the sense of sacrifice and risk were taken away. Would Constance ever quite know how well she was loved, if she had taken a secondary place in his heart all through the time of his probation? Why could he not tell her of his love now, and see how gladly, how nobly, she would share his toil, his poverty or his wealth? Would they ever really understand one another if he went on to the end, believing that his love was incompatible with duty?

"And you think," pursued Eugénie quietly, "that you can purchase happiness for others, only at the cost of your own?"

He was silent awhile and then he said,

"I am not unhappy."

"Yet you are not happy either. There is a sense of incompleteness in your life. There is a void which you cannot fill. Devotion and enthusiasm can do very much but not all. God gave us our natures—it is He Who has made love the seal and corner-stone of all."

"Love to God, or love to man?" he asked, speaking rapidly and looking away.

"Can we so utterly dissociate them, as you would seem to say? Does not the greater include the less?"

"I have loved—I do love ——" he began.

"You do indeed," she answered with significance.
"Only you will stifle your love."

He looked at her appealingly.

"You know why."

"Yes."

"And yet you blame me?"

"I do."

"Tell me why."

"I blame you for your want of faith. You who know God, why do you not trust Him?"

Yes, she was the stronger now. For the moment she had outstripped him in the race. The simple, child-like faith which he had helped to plant, had given her a clearer insight into some things than he himself possessed.

"Want of faith?" he repeated, and looked earnestly at her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. God has given you great talents—talents which enable you to take up a distinct position in life, and marry as other men do. He has given you too, a deep, pure love for a good woman, who would make a noble help-meet for you in all your work and toil. You love her, yet you will not take your love as God's gift, because you have not faith in His power."

"Not—faith?"

"No; you think you ought to give your time and money, and your life itself to the poor around you. It may be so. God's messages are easily read by the hearts He addresses. But you *know* that He has given you this great love to cherish. You *know* that Constance would be a worthy helper in every labour of love, in every noble ideal you strive after. You

know all this and yet you are silent. You have not faith in God, or you would trust the future to Him. He would make your way plain. He would show you that your life can still be used in His service and for His glory, even if it be not quite after the lines you have yourself laid down. Who knows best—He or you?”

Willoughby was silent. Then he said with some hesitation,

“I have seen so much misery from hasty, ill-assured marriages, even where love played an important part.”

Eugénie smiled thoughtfully.

“There are so many kinds of love,” she said, “and all are not alike God-given. We love many people who do not lead us nearer to God, but rather the other way: and these are loves that do not stand the test of time; but fade slowly and grow cold and dead. But when a love grows steadily as years pass on, when it ennobles us, and seems to bring us near to God and to heaven itself, when it is the greatest of helps along the path we wish to tread, then I am sure it is a God-given love, and why should He send us such loves if He does not mean them to be accepted as His gift, and the future trusted to Him?”

There was another long silence. Eugénie was almost afraid of her own boldness now that she had really spoken out her thoughts. Willoughby was silent. He seemed almost unconscious of her presence. They sat still and speechless for a very long time. What was passing through his mind she could only surmise, for he did not speak to give her the clue.

At last he rose and said,

“Thank you, Mrs. Durley,” and walked away into the neighbouring shrubbery.

Constance was some time in returning; but she came at last, and it was evident that the weighty matter of furnishing had been settled.

Willoughby appeared from his solitary walk, looking as composed as ever, and the cousins took their departure together as they had come.

"That is a very sweet girl," said old Mr. Mason looking after them, "very sweet and very sensible and essentially *womanly*. I hope that young jackanapes is good enough for her; that's all."

"I think they are just made for one another," answered Eugénie, smiling in spite of herself at the epithet applied to the grave and earnest Willoughby.

"Then why didn't he find it out before? Is he too modest?—or too conceited?"

"Neither, I believe. But everything will come right now, I feel sure. You will understand him better when he has lived a year under your roof."

"Fine words! Fine words!" muttered the irascible old man. "I've half a mind to adopt the girl and shut her up here, and leave the boy out of the question altogether!"

"Perhaps the boy might decline to be left out!" returned Eugénie with a smile. "The girl and boy may have a prejudice against being separated."





CHAPTER XXX.

CONSTANCE AND WILLOUGHBY.

CONSTANCE and Willoughby walked away together.

He was silent and preoccupied; but at first she did not observe this. The revelations made by the old man, whose house they had just quitted, occupied her thoughts. She speculated about the newcomers, what manner of people they would be, and what could have put this odd idea into Mr. Mason's head.

She talked, and Willoughby gave abstracted answers. At length she observed this, and asked if he was tired or unwell.

He seemed to wake out of a dream, and passed his hand across his brow. She fancied he looked pale.

"You have been working too hard, Willoughby. You have had no rest or change all this long hot summer; and it is like midsummer to-day, although it is September. You will break down if you go on like this. Let us sit down here in the shade. Why did you not tell me you were tired?"

She spoke with an anxious solicitude, as one who had a right to feel troubled on his account.

They were walking along a road which bordered a small wood; and a little way within were some felled tree trunks, lying in tempting shade. Upon these they seated themselves, he following her willingly, and then he looked into her anxious face with a reassuring smile.

"It is not what you think, Constance. I am quite well—only I have something on my mind."

"Something on your mind, Willoughby—something you cannot tell me?"

"On the contrary something I must tell you. We have had few secrets from one another all these years."

"Very few."

She did not say "none," and he noticed it. What had been her secret that he had not known? He looked into her face, and it seemed to him that his eyes had been opened, for he saw there what he had never seen before.

In spite of its earnest sweetness and serenity, there was a deep-seated sadness in Constance's face that he had never noticed before. It was not a transitory, surface sadness, nor a brooding, visible melancholy; yet it had given a certain fixed gravity to the countenance not often seen in one so young.

Had Constance then known trouble that he had not shared? Was there something upon her mind of which she spoke no word to him? What was it? Had he been blind all these years, or was this shadow but newly fallen upon her? What could be the cause?

His heart beat more fast than was its wont. In one brief moment he had passed in review all the years of their past life, their mutual trust and confidence, all that they had been to one another since the days of early childhood, how they had helped and

counselled one another, how they had understood and sympathised one with the other, and had been more to each other than perhaps they themselves had known. That he had grown to love Constance as his own soul Willoughby had known for long; but he had never known, never guessed, that she, perhaps, had given him more than a brother's love. He awoke to a sweet belief that such had been the case. The ideal of duty that he had set up before his eyes began to look to him like an idol. Eugénie's simple rebuke had gone home to his heart. God had surely not sent him this great love to be trampled under foot. He must take it in simple faith, and leave the future in His hands.

He had driven the thought of human love from his heart, fancying, as good and holy men in all ages have done, that it must be a snare, a temptation, a stumbling-block in the path of duty; he believed God had willed that he should live his life alone, giving up all for His service, and he had accepted this future bravely and resignedly.

Now, all in a moment as it seemed to him, he saw that what he had taken as the finger of God, was but the thought of his own heart. God had given to him the best and richest of all his good gifts, the love of a good woman. Was that gift to be lightly cast away?

Looking into Constance's sweet eyes, he knew that he was loved, and his soul seemed to go out to meet hers.

"Constance," he said, with the simple directness of an intensely earnest nature, "will you be my wife?"

She started, and gazed into his face with a colour that came and went in quick flushes; but what she read there was enough. She laid her hand in his and answered with equal simplicity,

“Yes, Willoughby.”

For a long time after those quiet words were spoken, which linked their lives together for time and for eternity, no others passed between them.

“Constance,” he said at last, with a curious smile deep down in his dark eyes, “I did not ask if you could love me.”

“Perhaps you knew without,” she answered.

“Constance,” he went on earnestly, “I did not know it an hour ago.”

She looked up at him wondering what was to come next.

“I have loved you for years, Constance, with a child’s love, a boy’s love, and last of all with a man’s love. I tried to subdue that last love. Until lately I hardly knew to what an extent it had mastered me. Even then I tried to tear it up and trample on it—ah! how foolish I was! But believe me, I never knew—never guessed—that you——”

“I know, I know,” she interposed quickly. “I know you, Willoughby. You need not tell me these things. I think I have loved you always: but I must not be a fetter to you. I would not stand between you and your duty—even now.”

He looked at her with a steadfast manly tenderness.

“‘What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’ Constance, can you doubt that it is God who has joined our hearts?”

She laid her cheek against his hand. Her heart was too full to speak.

“If I did not feel this, Constance, I might still be afraid of my love, as once I was. I think I was unconsciously afraid of anything which should bring me

such unmixed happiness? Why is it that we are inclined to fear happiness? Does not our Heavenly Father love to see His children happy? I have said in my heart, times without number, 'Such happiness is not for me. I am meant for a life of toil. I must look for my happiness in another world, not in this.' Is it for us to map out our lives, and measure out our own joy or sorrow? Why could I not trust in God's goodness, and take with thankfulness the good gifts He offered?"

"Ah, Willoughby, there are two sides to every question. Are you sure that a wife will not be a hindrance to you in the life you have planned for yourself?"

He stooped and kissed her serious face.

"My Constance," he said tenderly, "my wife will be my best help-meet, in every duty that lies before me. As for my life, it is in God's hands. He will plan it out before me. I have done with trying to take my future into my own keeping. Little as I knew it, that is what I was trying to do. Each day will bring its daily round of duties, and grace and guidance will be given with the daily bread. We shall not be rich people, Constance, but we shall have enough for our simple wants, and enough to spare for others. I am secure of an income which will always leave a margin for that. For the rest we must trust to Providence. I shall be a busy man—a hard-worked man perhaps. My poor patients must not lose their friend, and I must still extend my practice to meet future needs; but with a home where my wife will be waiting for me will brighten the hardest day's labour, and as you have helped me heretofore, you will help me in the future."

"Indeed I will," she answered, "only better, far better. I have had so many to think for heretofore—

Lucile, the children, those of the household who looked to me for service. Now that will be changed. You will be my first care. Your work my first duty. To lighten your labour of love will be my highest privilege—as it has always been.”

They had very much to say to one another, those two who met nearly each day of their lives—very much that never had, and never could have been said before.

The shadows were lengthening before they moved homewards, and as they neared Lucile’s house, it seemed to them as though they had been pledged to one another all their lives. Without doubt they had unconsciously been absorbed by thoughts of each other ever since they could remember; but the words that day spoken had set a seal upon their happiness which no power on earth could break.

Lucile was in the garden waiting for them.

“I declare you two are the most tiresome pair in the world, when once you go to see that stupid old man! You said you would be back at four, and here is half-past five, and tea growing cold, and you are only just home. I hope you are properly ashamed of yourselves.”

“Not at all,” answered Willoughby placidly, “and you wrong our worthy old friend. He did not detain us long. It was our own private affairs.”

“Private fiddlesticks! I only wish you had any private affairs worth discussing!”

Once or twice before, when Lucile had assumed her snappish airs, she had dropped an enigmatical sentence to the same effect. It had not been comprehended then, but Willoughby began now to understand several things which had been a puzzle to him before.

“Well, I don’t know what you call worth discussing,

but we have thought them so. Please give me some tea. Constance, you look hot."

"If you had any consideration for Constance, you would not take her about in this grilling heat, to discuss your dirty patients, who are the only objects of interest in the wide world for you. Oh yes, I know you are an excellent creature, Willoughby—Constance, don't fly at me, I appreciate him quite as much as he deserves; but I do get sick of his philanthropy. Here, take your tea and be thankful for it. You look baked to death, Constance—why do you let him make a slave of you?"

Constance's face was rosy red. She took her tea in silence; Willoughby stood beside Lucile, smiling. She was irritated by his imperturbability.

"I've half a mind to stop all my doles of soup and jelly and milk. You are getting insufferable with your devotion, Willoughby. I loathe enthusiasts!"

"Do you loathe me?"

"Sometimes I do—heartily."

"Ah!"

"Of course you don't care. You would only care for me if I lived in a pig-stye, and was dirty and miserable and diseased! Thank you; I should not care to purchase your love at that price."

"Lucile, don't!" pleaded Constance.

Willoughby was looking at her with a suddenly aroused interest and curiosity.

"And so, Lucile," he said reflectively, "that is really the way in which my life has struck you?"

Constance made vehement signs of disapproval, but Lucile would not heed.

"If you want to know the truth—yes."

"Ah!" he said again and smiled.

The smile roused Lucile to fresh wrath.

"I dare say you think it very fine; and if you kill yourself I don't care particularly; but I do object to have Constance roasted alive at the altar of your devotion to your patients."

"I assure you my patients have nothing to do with to-day's roasting," answered Willoughby coolly, "Constance and I have been discussing our own future prospects."

Lucile looked at him quickly and searchingly; and a look of veiled sarcasm flashed over her face.

"Have you indeed? How interesting! And what may they be, pray?"

"We are going to get married as quickly as possible. Constance has promised to take me for better, for worse (for worse, you will doubtless persuade her to believe). She is going to sacrifice herself upon the altar of matrimonial devotion."

Lucile sprang up suddenly and embraced her brother-in-law with intense fervour.

"Willoughby, you are the best boy in the whole world, and the wisest!"

"My character has undergone a marvellous metamorphosis in five seconds of time," he answered, kissing her with unusual warmth.

"Ah, you don't understand! You don't understand! You are only a man after all!" and Lucile waved one hand with an imperious gesture, as if to bid him keep his distance. "Go away now. You are a dear boy—a better boy than I ever believed. I'll double your rations for your patients, and I'll never abuse them again; but go away, I want Constance all to myself. Now that you have proved yourself human, I shall believe

in your perfection ; but go away. Constance will soon be your property, but she is mine now, and I want her all to myself."

Willoughby turned obediently and left them ; and Lucile with a little cry, half laughter, half tears, threw her arms round her adopted sister.

"Oh my dear, my dearest child, I cannot tell you how glad I am ! You always were perfection, and now I do believe Willoughby will be the same !"





CHAPTER XXXI.

AN OLD MAN'S PLAN.

MR. MASON," said Willoughby Beauchamp a week later, "I have a piece of news for you."

"Humph! Why could you not come with it earlier? I've been expecting you these three days, to come and see how the house looks now."

"You don't mean you have all ready so soon?"

"Pretty nearly. I won't stand any loitering or delay. Oh yes, I stir up the people when I deal with them. They know better than to keep me waiting. 'Take the job or leave it,' say I, 'but if you take it, it must be done at once——' Young man, you are not listening to a word I say!" and he rapped his stick so sharply on the gravel walk that Willoughby fairly started.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Oh, all right, all right. I'm not such a fool as to want teaching that young men never care to listen to old ones. Well, boy, have it out! What is this great matter you have on your mind?"

Willoughby was looking at his host with a glance of half humorous, half serious scrutiny.

"I wonder what you will say to it."

"You'll know in a second or so, if you don't hang fire," was the somewhat grim rejoinder.

"Very true, I shall." Willoughby paused awhile and then added slowly and concisely,

"I am going to be married next month."

"There's another good man ruined!" exclaimed old Mason with a groan, although his eyes gleamed and twinkled beneath their shaggy brows. "What a world we do live in to be sure! Not a man of us knows when he's well off—and I'm no wiser than the rest! But I did think better things of you!"

Willoughby laughed.

"I am sorry it is such a shock to you. Do you not care to hear the lady's name?"

"No, I don't!"

"She is rather a favourite of yours."

"I tell you I have no favourites."

"Ah indeed! Appearances are deceptive. Well, I am going to tell you all, now that I have begun. It is my cousin, Constance Seymour, that I am going to marry."

"Oh indeed! You think yourself good enough for her, do you?"

"No I do not. I only know that my life would be hopelessly incomplete without her."

"And she is willing to take you?"

"Yes, she is. God bless her!"

The old man and the young doctor stood looking at one another full in the face. Some subtle sympathy was drawing their hearts together.

"Come in doors with me, boy," said the old man at length, "we must have some talk together, you and I."

Willoughby followed the master into the now com-

pleted house; and cast many admiring glances round him as he saw how quaintly beautiful everything around was made to look, how harmoniously old-fashioned and antiquated the rooms appeared, and yet how comfortable and home-like. He pictured the delight of the "newly-married pair" who were to call this house theirs; and the thought flashed through his mind,

"What a home this would make for my Constance!"

Mr. Mason led the way into his own "den." He never could feel at ease in ordinary, orderly rooms. In the confusion and litter which abounded in his odd sanctum, he breathed freely, and was master of himself and all about him.

When Willoughby had taken the seat indicated and sat opposite his host, he saw that an unusual expression had stolen over the old man's face. It seemed as if the native kindliness of his heart were beaming out from his eyes, unmasked by any of the rough cynicism with which he was wont to cloak it.

"My boy," he said, "I am going to ask you to confide somewhat in me; and then I am going to confide unreservedly in you."

Willoughby bent his head in silent assent, wondering much what was coming.

"You have loved your cousin for a long time, have you not?"

He flushed up somewhat.

"I believe I have; although I have not been fully aware of it for long."

"And for some time after that, you were deterred from speaking on account of uncertain prospects?"

"More from a scruple of duty, which troubled me a good deal at one time."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that although I could afford to marry, and saw my way to making a lucrative practice, I felt as if my duty to my fellow-men ought to be my chief concern, and absorb the main of my time and my means."

"And why has that view changed?"

"It has not changed exactly, but it has modified itself. I feel that Constance is my first duty. I never knew till a week ago that she had given to me the same love as I have given to her. That entirely changed the aspect of affairs."

The old man bent his head, and drummed silently upon the table with one hand.

"*'C'est l'amour, l'amour, l'amour,'*" he murmured to himself, "the old, old story. And so, lad, you are going to marry; and what will become of your poor patients?"

"They shall not be neglected," answered Willoughby earnestly. "I am young and strong, and Constance will help me nobly. I have no fear of hard work. I will work for her and for them both. I do not fear the future. I know we shall have guidance and help."

"You did not think so a year—six months ago, even. What has changed you?"

"I lacked faith. I wished to rule my life by my own standard. My motive, which was good, hid my error from me; but I can see it now."

"Who opened your eyes?"

"I think it was Mrs. Durley; at least she placed the clue in my hands."

"Ah!"

After a short silence he asked,

"And where do you propose to live?"

"For the first six months in the house I have occupied so long. There is ample space for a small household such as ours will be; and my landlady will let us make our own arrangements. At Easter two or three houses near will be vacant. I shall secure one of these when we have made our choice."

The old man looked at him with an odd smile in his eyes.

"Well, boy, you have made your confidences frankly; and I suppose it is my turn now. I wonder if you will be surprised to hear that I have a favour to ask of you."

Willoughby did look somewhat surprised.

"I don't know how many years it is since I asked a favour of any man; but I am going to ask one from you."

"And I trust it will be one in my power to grant," said the young man earnestly.

"You mean it would be a pleasure to you to do me a service?"

"I do."

"You would like to befriend an old man?"

"I should most certainly."

"Even at the cost of some of those feelings a young man most plumes himself upon."

Willoughby began to look puzzled.

"You speak in riddles, sir; I will serve you if I can. You have been a kind friend to me, and it would be a pleasure to me to carry out any wish of yours, only I should be glad to know definitely what that wish is."

"That is soon told. Bring your wife here, and make this house your home."

Willoughby sat like one amazed.

"The house is ready for you—decorated and furnished according to her taste," continued the old man, "come, and come quickly. The sooner the better."

"But, Mr. Mason—those relatives of yours—the newly-married couple?"

"Well, won't you be a newly-married couple—eh? Do you think you'll be taken for old stagers all in a moment? Not a bit of it, my boy. You'll look just as foolish as the rest of them! Give me a newly-married couple, for downright imbecility of appearance!"

But Willoughby was too much in earnest to laugh. He said slowly and perplexedly,

"Relations of yours, you said."

"Connections I believe was the word I used. Go and study that chart on the wall. You will see what I mean then."

Willoughby obeyed, and examined the tree, which showed the distant connection of old Mr. Mason with their family.

"I see what you mean, but surely so very far back and slight a kinship can give no claim. It is too much."

"I never said I had a claim," snapped the old man. "I told you from the first that it was a favour I had to exact. Can't you understand your own tongue? You said you would be glad to serve me, and now you tell me I have no claim. A nice young man you are!"

Willoughby put his hands upon Mr. Mason's shoulders and looked down into his face.

"You know what I mean perfectly well. I mean that I, that we, have no claim upon you—upon such a generous offer as you make. It is too much. I cannot understand it."

"You must be singularly obtuse then. Pity Constance is not here. She has twice your sense. My boy," he said, suddenly changing his tone and speaking with an almost pathetic gentleness, "I am an old man now, and you know, as well as I know myself, that my health is very gradually failing, and my strength slowly deserting me. I have lived a lonely life and have been happy in it; but there have been moments when I have repented my choice, and have longed for a companionship beyond what my dogs and my flowers can give. I do not want to die alone, as I have lived. I do not want to live the last days or years of my life in this unbroken solitude. When my health gives way, as sooner or later it will, I long to be tended by loving hands, to be watched over by those whom I have learned to love. Willoughby Beauchamp, I appeal to you, I make no claim, for I have none to urge. I only ask you, in the name of our common humanity which you hold so sacred, to come and help and succour me in the future that stretches out before me. I have watched you for many years, little as you knew it, little as I dreamed what would come of it. You were my kinsfolk in a very distant fashion, I was interested in you all, and I watched you."

He paused awhile and then continued,

"I watched you, Willoughby Beauchamp. I learned much about you—you and your cousin, who is to be your wife. I liked you, I respected you, and I determined to know you. I was in no hurry. I waited many years. Rome was not built in a day, nor yet any man's character. I made sure of my ground before I began to act; but I watched, and waited, and thought. . .

"After I knew you, and you had visited me, you and

others once or twice, I became suddenly aware of a blank in my life, of which I had hitherto been all but unconscious. I found I liked to talk to my own kind, to exchange ideas, to hear their thoughts and feelings. For twenty-five years I had hardly seen a soul. I had forgotten that once I was a sociable man.

“Gradually a new hope, a new plan, formed itself in my brain, and worked itself slowly out. I have a fair income, and a considerable fortune to bequeath to someone at my death ; and I am going to bequeath it to you and to Constance. Now don't interrupt me, you young jackanapes. I *will* be heard in peace.” With a sudden burst of irritation these words had been spoken, and with equal suddenness the old man resumed his gentle, pleading tone.

“I am an old, childless man, without a claim of any kind upon me ; and I adopt a son and a daughter to love and cherish me in my old age. I am not all selfish in this. I have studied their welfare too, and I think I can accomplish my own dream without sacrificing their happiness. To my son, I make over by deed of gift upon his wedding-day the house in which we now stand, and all the land I own in the county—some two thousand acres in all, let on favourable terms to various tenants. The one stipulation I make, is that I remain on in the old house and have undisputed control over the garden. Upon my daughter I have settled the sum of one thousand a year on her marriage ; and I trust them so completely that I know they will make a happy home for the old man who has adopted them, and will give him all dutiful care in his failing state, and perhaps a meed of that love which the young, who are generous and noble, can feel for us poor shattered wrecks of humanity.”

Mr. Mason had said his say, and a deep silence reigned for awhile ; Willoughby stood in his old place looking utterly astonished and bewildered. He spoke at last in a hesitating way.

“ Mr. Mason—Sir—I hardly grasp it yet. I do not know what to say.”

“ I do not want you to say anything, I want you to come.”

“ You are so generous, so kind—I must talk to Constance. She——”

“ Ay, talk to her. She will have some sense. She will be generous and kind and womanly, and will know how to give gracefully—men never do. She will not hesitate. She will not decline the trust thrust upon her. She will come and tend a poor old man in his feeble helplessness, and will think of him before she thinks of herself, and the petty affairs of life. Oh yes, go and talk to Constance and give her my message. Tell her an old man wants her sweet presence in his house, that he craves to hear her gentle voice, and to be tended by her careful hands. Tell her he has a father's love to offer to her. Ask her if she will try to give a daughter's in return. Tell her an old man's dream waits her consent for its realisation ; and that he has done his part in all hope and confidence in her generosity and devotion. Tell her all this, and all I have told you beside, and if Constance hesitates as you have done—why I am a bigger fool than I take myself for.”

Willoughby went his way as one in a dream to find Constance.

Mr. Mason's words proved that he had not estimated her character amiss.



CHAPTER XXXII.

UNITED.

“**M**Y boy! My boy! Mother, have you seen my boy? Oh, where is he gone?”

Lady Durley started at the sound of Eugénie’s voice, and at the word she used—“Mother.”

During the long four months of her residence at Linley Castle, she had never called her mother-in-law by this sacred name, and it had seemed as if she never would. Could it be that of late she had begun to use it in her thoughts? Why else did it spring so naturally to her lips in the hour of her agitation and distress?

Lady Durley rose in anxious haste.

“What is it, my child? What has happened?”

“Gascoigne—my boy—he is gone!” Eugénie was white with apprehension and agitation. “I left him playing in the park. I was not absent long. John did not have much writing for me to-day. When I got back, Ross was tied to a tree, whining and restless. Gascoigne was gone.”

“Gone!”

“Yes, he is nowhere to be found. Nobody has seen him. And there is the fair at Fontbury—he begged to be allowed to go there yesterday; but I would not

permit it. I never dreamed of his disobeying me. Ah, why could I not have taken your advice?"

"The carriage is just coming round," said Lady Durley quietly. "I was going out to lunch to-day; but I will disappoint my friends for once. We will go and find the boy. Could not the dog help us?"

"He is gone. He was off like an arrow as soon as I released him—on Gascoigne's track I suppose. If he can find him, all will be well; but I fear—I fear he will lose himself in the dust and crowd. Oh Mother, tell me, are children not *stolen* sometimes by gipsies and tramps?"

Eugénie's eyes were dilated with fear and horror. Her mother-in-law seemed to her like a tower of strength. Lady Durley was able to conceal her anxiety under a composure of manner that was reassuring.

"Seldom in these days, I believe. Such crimes are too easily traced now. There are the wheels upon the drive. We will go and find him. Be brave, my child. We will leave no stone unturned until we have the boy safe home again."

Eugénie took Lady Durley's hand and pressed it convulsively to her lips.

The alarm had spread through the household. Servants were preparing to start off in search of the missing child. Sir John came out of his study, looking pale and anxious. In spite of his weakness, which was now very great, he insisted on driving into Fontbury to make the necessary inquiries. But they were not destined to go far that day. Even before the carriage had started, a servant came running back to say that a horseman was riding towards the house, and that the dog was with him.

This piece of news caused a sudden pause, and the next moment Willoughby Beauchamp appeared, riding fast towards them, Gascoigne mounted before him in triumph, and Ross bounding at his side.

The child uttered a gay shout as he saw the group upon the terrace, and waved his hat with a delighted laugh.

Eugénie's eyes filled suddenly with tears.

Sir John advanced and Willoughby reined in his horse.

"I have brought back the truant. I hope you have not been anxious. He had just arrived at Mr. Mason's when I got there, alone and very magnificent in his independence. We learned that his absence was unknown to you, so I brought him back as fast as possible. I hope you have not been very uneasy."

"Our anxiety has been but short-lived, thanks to your promptness," said Lady Durley with unusual warmth. "We are very grateful to you, Dr. Beauchamp, for relieving us so quickly and effectually.

Willoughby was genuinely pleased to have been of use, and his face showed it.

"He is a bold little fellow—a true soldier's son—he does not know what fear is, I believe. He had tied up his staunch protector, lest he should hinder his escape. We met the dog as we came back. The creature was almost human in his joy at the encounter, as soon as he heard the child's voice."

They thanked him again, Lady Durley with special emphasis, and he rode off, having no more time to spare. Eugénie had the boy in her arms, and her tears were slowly falling upon his wondering face.

"Oh Gascoigne, I never thought my little boy would be so naughty!"

"I wasn't naughty," answered the boy stoutly. "I only wanted to see Mr. Mason and his dogs."

"But you know you never go out of the park alone. You know you promised me you never would."

Gascoigne laughed in bold triumph and delight. The enormity of his offence did not seem to strike him at all.

"I wanted to go."

"You should have waited till I came back, and asked me."

"Wanted to go *then*."

"You were very disobedient and naughty, Gascoigne. You have made us all very unhappy. Are you not sorry for doing wrong?"

He looked in her face with laughing eyes, and shook his head.

Eugénie began to realise, for the first time, that her boy was a baby no longer, and that he might not be as faultless as she has persuaded herself heretofore.

"Why was Ross tied? Who tied him?"

"I did. I thought perhaps he'd stop me, so I tied him up."

"Oh Gascoigne, you have been very naughty!"

"Haven't been naughty, I've been good. I wanted to go to the fair, and I didn't, 'cause Mamsey said 'no.' I went to see the old man and his dogs. Chap likes going there."

"You have disobeyed me all the same, Gascoigne," said Eugénie gravely.

The child looked into his mother's face and laughed gaily.

"Mamsey is trying to be cross! Mamsey won't be cross long. Naughty Mamsey to scold Chap!"

He laughed again gleefully ; but the laugh died suddenly away, as he saw another face looking gravely down at him.

The boy did not dare to trifle with his grandmother's displeasure ; he looked at her appealingly.

"Don't scold, Grandy, don't be cross. I'm going to be a good boy now."

He would have slipped his hand in hers, but Lady Durley drew back.

"No, Gascoigne. I have nothing to say to disobedient little boys, who are not sorry for doing wrong."

Gascoigne's lip quivered. He had never heard his grandmother speak so severely before, nor call him by his full name.

"Chap is sorry now."

"You were not sorry when you knew you had made your mother unhappy, I am not pleased with you. No, I have no kisses for you. When I come home this afternoon, I hope I shall hear a better account of you. You have disappointed me very much."

With that Lady Durley turned away and got into the carriage that was still waiting. She was grave and preoccupied during the visit she paid, and returned home earlier than was usual when she had driven so far. It seemed to her as if she had much to think of as she drove.

She had reached her own room, had laid aside her out-door garments, and was resting in an easy-chair by the open window, when she heard a low tap at the door.

The next moment Eugénie had entered, and was kneeling before her, her eyes dewy with feeling, her face turned pleadingly upward,

“Mother,” she said tremulously, “I have come to ask for your forgiveness.”

Lady Durley took the clasped hands in hers, and looked down with some emotion into the earnest, quivering, upturned face.

“Forgiveness, Eugénie?”

“Yes, forgiveness, I have been so wrong, so foolish, so proud, so jealous. You know something; but you do not know all—I will tell you if I can—some day; but I terribly crave forgiveness now.”

“My dear child—my dear daughter.”

“You will have me for a daughter? Ah Mother, how I have longed for this! I feared—I feared you would never be able to accept me as one. I know I am not what I should be—what I might have been had I always had a mother to teach me and guide me. I have grown up self-willed, jealous, resentful—I cannot count up my own faults; but I have tried, I am trying still to conquer them. Will you help me, Mother? Will you make me like you?—and help me to train up my child, as you have trained up yours?”

Lady Durley’s answer was an embrace, which from her spoke volumes.

“My dear child,” she said, “my dear daughter. Eugénie, we have misunderstood each other I think before; and the fault is never all on one side. Let us forget the past, and begin life again. It may be we have many years to spend together—in sorrow and loneliness. My daughter, can we comfort one another in the trials God sends us? You have passed through waters of bitter trouble, which have not yet subsided, and they are even now waiting to overwhelm me—and the old do not fight through the waves like the young.”

Lady Durley's voice shook somewhat. Eugénie took her hands and laid her lips upon them.

"Mother, dearest Mother—ah, is it true? Must he—die? He has suffered so much less of late. Sometimes I begin to hope——"

"I have gone through that too many times," answered Lady Durley with the calmness of despair. "I cannot blind my eyes any longer. You have only to look at him now. He is wasted to a shadow. It seems to me sometimes, when I see him in his sleep, as though death had already set his seal upon his brow, and as if he never could rise from his bed again."

Eugénie was silent. The repressed anguish of the mother's face went to her heart. She knew so well the desolation of that blank which death, and death alone, can cause. She had sympathy now to spare from her own sorrow, and it was lovingly given to this newly found mother."

"Ah Mother," she said tenderly, "would that I could comfort you! What can I do? I have only my love to give."

"Then love me, love me, my child; for I stand in sore need of comfort; and only love can fill the blank that death will leave. Oh my son, my son, would I could die for thee!"

Seldom indeed was Lady Durley so moved. It seemed to Eugénie as if she clung to her for support and for comfort. A strange new sense of protecting love towards one so lonely, old, and desolate rose up within her, and in her heart she vowed that what a daughter's love could do, to soothe and strengthen and console, should not be lacking to this bereaved mother.

"I cannot comfort you, Mother dear," she whispered,

"I cannot make up to you for those you have lost ; but I can love you, I do love you, and I shall love you always, more and more. . . And, Mother, God knows your sorrow, He will comfort you."

Very softly and almost timidly were the last words uttered. It seemed so strange to find herself speaking thus to her mother-in-law.

Lady Durley looked mournfully into Eugénie's eyes, and slowly shook her head.

"My child," she said, "I have never doubted God, or His word. I have tried to do Him service. I have tried to lead a Christian life. I have had no doubts to battle with. Faith has been easy to me. As I have been taught so I have believed—conscientiously and firmly. And yet, in my hour of trial, God gives me none of the help His children look to receive from Him."

Eugénie looked perplexed and distressed.

"I was careless, thoughtless, wicked all my life before. I did not really love God, nor even know Him ; but He came to me in my time of trouble, and He took the sting away."

"You are young," said Lady Durley slowly and sadly. "I think all things are easy to the young. But when the springs of life are running low, and we have nothing to hope from the future, and the wheels of life are only revolving slowly and painfully, soon to cease altogether—then that confidence and hope of which we read and speak become all but impossible of attainment."

Eugénie in her strong young confidence and trust, hardly understood the meaning of this quiet resignation ; she felt that it was beyond her power as yet, to enter fully into the feelings of one so much older than herself, one who had seen so much of life, and had

learned its lessons in so different a school from herself ; and yet she longed to bring some help to one whose need was so great.

"Mother," she said gently—and the name seemed like music to both the women, a link to draw them ever closer and closer—"Mother, I am sure God does not love the old less than He loves the young. If He came to me and comforted me, I am sure He will not hide His face from you."

"I will try to trust Him," said Lady Durley sadly ; "but His ways are past finding out. It is hard to see why both my sons should be taken away from me, whilst I am left, a useless, miserable old woman, whom no one needs."

"Hush, Mother dearest. I need you, and my boy needs you. Ah, what would become of him and of me if I had not you to turn to?"

Lady Durley's rare tears fell slowly.

"Ah ! my child, you are good to think so and to speak so ; but my sons, my sons !"

"Yes, yes, I know, I know. Lionel was my husband—I know so well what it is ; but I try—oh, and sometimes I *can* say—though not always, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Silence reigned for awhile in the room. Softer, gentler thoughts were stealing into both hearts. They had each found a friend to love and trust, and the revelation of mutual love had been very sweet to both. Gradual as had been the growth of that love, its manifestation was sudden and unexpected.

"God bless you, my daughter," said Lady Durley at last, after a long silence. "You have done me good

already. I sorely need help—all the help I can get ; for I feel as if what lies before me is greater than I can bear.”

Eugénie had one more whispered word before she left :

“ ‘ And a Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place ; the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.’ ”

“ ‘ Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’ ”





CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SHADOW.

YES, Eugénie's last battle with self-will and pride had been fought out, she had conquered the last remnant of anger and jealous distrust; she had won a final victory over herself, and now she was reaping her reward, in a sense of restful assurance of love which was grateful indeed to her love-craving nature.

It was a little thing that had sufficed to break down the last barrier of reserve and pride—no greater an event than the childish escapade of Gascoigne's, related in the last chapter; but small as it was, it sufficed to open Eugénie's eyes to many things to which she had before been blind.

It showed her that Lady Durley had been right in her estimate of the boy's character, where she had been wrong. Her blind, maternal confidence in her child's perfections had proved erroneous, where predictions founded upon a sound experience of human and child nature had been literally fulfilled. Gascoigne had proved himself, like all other boys, bold, mischievous, defiant. Why she should expect him to be faultless, it would be hard to say; but it had never

seriously entered her head that her engaging, winning little boy would deliberately disobey her.

He had done so, however, and her confidence in herself, and her code of education, had received a shock. This shock was greatly intensified by the child's utter inability to see the error of his ways, and his determination to make light of her gravity and ignore her displeasure. He showed very plainly that he considered himself master of the situation, was much aggrieved at the tone adopted by his mother, and obviously felt himself the injured party.

Eugénie was keenly conscious of the difference with which he regarded her displeasure, and that of Lady Durley. The former gave him no disquietude, did not even abash him; but he became shame-faced and conscience-stricken before his grandmother, and was eagerly anxious to propitiate her.

Eugénie had ample food for thought that day; and she had sufficient honesty and nobility of character to see herself, and own herself, in the wrong, even in the matter nearest to her heart—the management of her child.

She had so loved him—so craved his love—that she had been deliberately spoiling him, when she was least conscious of doing so. She had theorised over him, pictured a style of education in which love and tenderness, and gentle forbearance, should be the ingredients; and in which no harsh words, no severity, no punishment should be needed. She was in fact going to take a healthy, hardy, young out-door plant, and bring it up in a hot-house atmosphere, that it might grow and thrive the better.

Lady Durley's practical common sense and vigorous

justice, which had seemed cold and severe at one time, now struck her in a new light. Might it not be possible that the "old-fashioned" way of bringing up children, teaching obedience without comment or question, and punishing even small faults with unwavering firmness, was better for them than the newer way, now so much in vogue, of treating them with a peculiar, tender consideration, as if a word or a blow would shatter them, as if they were almost too sacred to be sharply rebuked?

Eugénie had read and thought a good deal about the "angel nature" of childhood; but experience was beginning to upset the angelic theory. She began to think of some words in an older Book still, words written by men who surely did not speak without authority, and who warned parents again and again against sparing the rod and spoiling the child, who admonished them solemnly to correct and chasten their children, who told them that the "old Adam" was in their natures, not a heavenly purity and virtue.

Love was not synonymous with weak indulgence. The best mothers were those who had conquered themselves and their natural reluctance, and had brought up their sons with loving yet resolute firmness, and had taught them from the first, that sin must not be trifled with—that each offence merits its own punishment.

Eugénie spent many hours in earnest prayerful thought, and came out humbled in her own eyes, feeling her youth and inexperience as she had seldom felt it before. And then she went to find her mother, and begged for the forgiveness she so sorely craved.

The last barrier was broken down. Those two hearts were united—bound together by a threefold

cord of love—love for the husband and son who was dead, for the son and brother who was dying, for the child, in whom now centred their remaining hope and love.

And there was another bond, more sacred even than this, which was drawing them ever closer to one another—the bond which always unites those who are seeking after God, worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

Very different were the natures of these two women, very different had been their training, and yet they were growing almost essential one to the other, and more so day by day.

The shadow was closing round that home, silently and almost imperceptibly, and yet all were conscious of its slow approach—the approach of the shadow of death.

Lady Durley awaited it in mute resignation, which would have been despair a few short weeks ago; but which was gilded now with the light of a growing hope and loving trust in God.

Eugénie's simple faith and its child-like expression had not been without effect. Untried, inexperienced and youthful as was this faith, it had taken deep root, and was already bearing blossom, with the promise of abundant fruit in God's good time. It refreshed the weary soul of the mournful mother to hear of the peace—the rest, the sense of restful protection—which God's Spirit had given to one young heart in the hour of its sore need. And Eugénie, on her side, received great benefit from constant intercourse with one who had read much and thought deeply through the years of a long life, upon the subjects which were almost new to her.

Lady Durley knew her Bible well—knew how to give a reason for every hope she entertained and for

every article of her belief, even though the faith and hope themselves might be burning dim.

Eugénie learned what boundless stores of wisdom, what endless lessons of love, what food for ceaseless meditation was stored up in the pages of that wonderful Book. New meanings awoke for her at every turn, and it seemed as if God's Spirit was surely her guide and counsellor, showing her the path wherein to walk, and giving her strength and confidence to lead another along the narrow way.

They had need of all the help they could give to each other, those two lonely women, for the shadow was coming very near—the new trouble was, as it were, hanging over their very heads.

Weeks had passed rapidly away, and a stormy autumn of wind and rain had succeeded the long hot summer.

Constance and Willoughby had been married quietly late in October, and were now away together, but were to arrive very shortly at their new home, where their old kinsman awaited them. Eugénie was happy in their happiness, and rejoiced with them in the fulfilment of their cherished dream, but the very fact of its realisation seemed to isolate her somewhat from them. They had one another now, and her own thoughts and feelings centred round those who needed her more, and leaned on her for support.

And at last the dreaded summons came.

It was on a stormy evening in November. The wind howled and the rain beat against the house, and there was that mournful wailing sound in the air, that accompanies a gale from the south-west.

Sir John had dined with his mother and Eugénie, and had not seemed worse than usual. He had

wasted away of late to a mere shadow, and his feeble strength had dwindled in proportion; but he had not given up his daily round of small duties, and he took his place at the foot of his table day by day, and declined to adopt invalid habits.

"Dr. Beauchamp and Constance arrived at the Rookery yesterday," Eugénie announced that day. "I heard it this morning. I suppose the bad weather hastened them a little. I must go and see them soon. I do so wonder how Mr. Mason will like it, now that the new régime has really begun."

"Ah, Willoughby Beauchamp is back, is he?" questioned Sir John. There had been an increase of intimacy of late between Linley Castle and Fontbury Park. "I am glad of that." He did not explain what made him glad, and nobody liked to ask the meaning of his look of relief and satisfaction.

When Lady Durley and Eugénie reached the drawing-room, the former asked, with some little constraint of manner,

"Do you think John looking any worse to-day?"

Eugénie hesitated somewhat.

"I hardly know—I thought he ate very little. He is so pale and so thin, it is hard to judge. Did you think him worse?"

"I think him worse every day. Sometimes I can hardly bear to look at him."

There was silence then, which it was difficult to break—the silence of mutual sorrow and dread.

Half an hour later a footman appeared, his face somewhat pale and scared.

"Would you please go to the master, my lady, he is in the study. He seems ill—worse than usual."

Lady Durley and Eugénie were at the study door almost before the words were spoken.

Sir John was lying upon the couch there, in an attitude that betokened extreme prostration. The old butler was standing over him with stimulant, a few drops of which he had succeeded in administering. The baronet's face was as white as chalk, sunken and hollow to an extent that was painful to witness. He seemed just conscious but that was all.

"His bell rang just now, and I found him like this," explained the servant. "He begins to look a little more like himself, I think."

"Someone go for Dr. Beauchamp at once," said Lady Durley with an air of authority. "Lose not a moment. Bring him back with you."

Then she went and sat down beside her son.

His eyes opened, and fixed themselves upon her with a look of recognition; but he made no attempt to speak. That effort seemed to be beyond his present power. She did not speak either, only took his cold hand, and sat beside him looking at him.

Eugénie watched them both for a few moments, and then stole away upstairs, to make sure that all was ready there for the sick man, who would soon be brought there—to die.

Yes, there was no mistaking the meaning of that stricken look upon his face. The message he has been so long expecting had reached him at last. He had long ago set his house in order, now he was called upon to leave it.

Dreamily Eugénie looked about her, making sure that all was ready, all in order. Dreamily she wondered, with a strange aching at heart, that was not all sadness,

what it must be like, that last ascent up the familiar stairs, which would never be traversed again by those weary feet; what he would feel, that stricken man, when laid upon the bed which he never would quit, save to be borne to his last quiet resting-place.

Such thoughts crowded into her brain and bewildered her. In her strong youth and vitality the mystery surrounding that shadowy passage seemed very deep—not very dark: but very deep and strange.

What could it be like, that gradual slipping away from life, the loosening of the silver cord, the first step into the dark, cold river?

Eugénie shivered involuntarily; but it was not with fear, rather was it an awe that brought with it a certain sense of strength and protection.

Surely God would not leave His children alone in that last dread hour. He would not leave them to battle unaided with the stormy waves of the river of death. With a startled sense of their universal boundless significance, she recalled her favourite words of comfort and support:

“A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.” . . . “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” . . . “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”

Yes, the Man, Christ Jesus, is with His children in all times of need. None can pluck them from His hand, not even death; for He has conquered death for our sakes, and it is swallowed up in victory.

Soothed and comforted by her quiet musing, Eugénie slowly descended, and waited in the hall for the speedy arrival of Dr. Beauchamp.

Willoughby did not keep them waiting long. He was inside the hall almost before the dog-cart drew up; and he gave his hand to Eugénie with a glance of mute inquiry. She gave him no answer by word or look, but led the way into the study.

He looked at Sir John, with the keen, inscrutable glance peculiar to men of his profession; and asked no question.

"We had better get him to bed," he said.

Quickly and quietly this was accomplished, and Willoughby returned shortly to the drawing-room, where the two anxious women waited in silence.

"That was very well done," he said quietly, "he stood it very well. Lady Durley, I think your son would be glad for you to go back to him."

Without a single question, the mother obeyed.

Eugénie stood looking at Willoughby—the question her lips could not frame shining in her anxious eyes.

"Yes, Mrs. Durley," he said quietly, "I suppose you do not need for me to tell you. This is the beginning of the end—come at last."

"How long?" she asked with trembling lips.

"I can hardly say. A few days—a week perhaps at most."

Eugénie breathed a little more freely.

"The danger is not immediate, then?"

"No, not exactly. It is wonderful how strongly life is bound up in a man of his age and constitution. I have been looking for long for this sudden collapse, yet even now it is not complete. He cannot rally: but most likely he will linger on for many days, in a quiet state of semi-consciousness."

"He will not suffer?"

“ I trust not—I think not. I believe all that has left him now. No, I hope the end may be very calm and painless. I believe that the bitterness of death, for him, is over.”

“ Will he know us ? ”

“ Yes. His mind is unclouded ; but the languor of extreme weakness is upon him. He will probably speak little and seem to sleep much ; but he will know more than he seems to do. Keep him tranquil and quiet—and let his mother be with him as much as she will. It will be best for them both.”

Eugénie turned aside her head to hide her tears. He took her hand and was gone. Then she went silently up to the quiet room, where the mother watched beside the dying bed of her son.

There was nothing to be done for him save to watch him. He knew her, and her presence gave him a visible satisfaction. Eugénie kissed them both with lingering tenderness, and left them alone together.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

ALL the day following the storm raged furiously round the Castle. Rain poured down in torrents, and hissed against the window-panes that seemed hardly able to keep it out. The wind moaned and shrieked round every corner, and its wailing voice kept up a ceaseless lamentation, only too clearly echoed in the hearts of those who watched with sleepless care round the sick-bed of the dying master.

Sir John had passed a peaceful night; and he was quiet and drowsy still. He knew everyone who came to his room. He had a smile and a faint word of greeting for all. He begged Willoughby Beauchamp not to come a second time through the storm that day to see him; and he asked once for the child, and watched him at play in a corner of the room, with a smile upon his white face.

Between whiles he remained in a drowsy state—the stupor of exhausted nature. He took a little nourishment from time to time, and slept occasionally; but more often than not he lay speechless and torpid, taking no notice of what went on around him.

As twilight drew on, Eugénie persuaded Lady Durley

to leave the room for a while, and lie down upon her own bed. Her long watch had lasted full eighteen hours, and that, together with her mental struggles, had fairly worn her out. She submitted to her daughter's loving care, and fell asleep from sheer exhaustion almost at once.

Then Eugénie stole away to Sir John's room, and sat beside the glowing fire, listening to the ceaseless moaning of the storm.

Many thoughts were rising within her—strange sad thoughts of sorrow and change. Her life during the past year seemed to rise up in review before her—the careless, happy days of the genial winter and warm bright spring, in the gay, sunny island of Malta—the sudden cloud upon the horizon of her happiness, and the bursting of the storm. Then the uprooting of her whole life, the desolation of parting, the dread presentiment of evil, the misery of a dismal, lonely life misunderstanding and misunderstood, and the awful heart-breaking loss, which in spite of all anticipation of evil, had fallen with crushing weight upon her.

All that seemed like a long, black dream of horror and pain, from which she had slowly awakened to find herself in a new world.

She had passed through the furnace of sorrow, and had learned there many a lesson, which only that trial can teach so surely and so well.

She had learned, in her hour of need, where to go for help. She had laid her burden of sin and sorrow at the foot of the Cross, and she had found in Christ her Saviour and Redeemer. Through the Son she had found the Father, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit had not been asked in vain.

In patient hope and trust she had battled bravely with trials and temptations and besetting sin. Many a time had she failed and faltered; but she had not given up striving; and weak and erring as she yet felt herself to be, she had laid hold on a faith which would be her sure guide through all future troubles, and her anchor of hope was securely fastened, where she knew it could not be moved.

Faith—hope—love—yes, even that last and greatest boon, was not denied her; and as she had learned to love God, she had learned too, to love her fellow-men; and above all, those who were nearest to her, and dependent upon her.

She could hardly realise now, how slowly, how hardly, she had given her love to her husband's kindred. They were so dear to her now, that it seemed incomprehensible how she had held aloof so long.

A softened look stole over her face as she looked at the sick man. Death was drawing very near—yet she did not strive nor cry. Death had taken away her nearest and dearest, and it seemed on that account as if he could not be quite a stranger. Surely God's messenger was not meant to be feared and dreaded. Eugénie, sitting there in the twilight, could find it in her heart to wish that her turn, too, had come to cross the silent river, and join the host upon the other side, where surely her husband would be the first to welcome her—

Her husband!—ah, how she missed him!—what would not she give for one sight of his dear face, one pressure of his strong hand—for his calm, resolute presence amongst them in their hour of trial. Sudden smarting tears sprang to her eyes, and a wave of unutterable yearning sadness surged over her soul;

but she struggled successfully to hide its outward expression; for she saw that Sir John's eyes were fixed intently upon her.

He seemed to be listening to something. She rose and crossed over to his side.

"Has Lionel come?" he asked. "I heard a horseman gallop towards the Castle. I knew it was Lionel coming back. Has he come?"

Eugénie shook her head gently. He had wandered a little in the night, Lady Durley had told her—the wandering of extreme weakness, from which he was easily roused—and had spoken a good deal of Lionel and his boyish days.

"Has he not come then, yet?"

"No,—not yet," answered Eugénie, with the least little quiver in her voice.

"Ah well, he will soon come. He could not be far away when I heard him. Lionel never cared for wind or weather; and I asked so often that he might come back before I went away. He will soon be here now. Where is mother—lying down?"

"Yes, she is resting. Do you want her?"

"No, no, let her rest. She was with me a long time—she will be surprised to see Lionel again. Did we think he had been killed? Ah yes; and having him back will almost fill the blank——"

"Dear John, I think you must not talk any more," said Eugénie gently, rather fearful lest this light-headedness should continue. "Take a little of this and try and sleep again."

He took a little from her of the stimulant she offered, thanked her with a smile, and settled himself again upon his pillows. *

"I feel as though I should sleep now. You will awake me when Lionel comes?"

And in effect, he fell almost at once into a natural sleep.

Eugénie sat beside the bed, a strange feeling of tremulous numbness stealing over her. Her heart beat, her head swam. For no reason that she could understand, her nerves were suddenly strung to a high pitch of tension. She felt as one who lives and moves in a dream.

Was she dreaming, or was it true, that there was some distant stir and bustle in the house? Nonsense! no sound from without could penetrate the solid doors that shut off Sir John's rooms in quietness and seclusion. Why then did Ross, who had lain for an hour motionless at her feet, rise suddenly and exhibit every symptom of uneasy, restless expectation.

Almost total darkness had fallen upon the room, only the glow of the fire cast a ruddy light upon the dark panelled walls, and an occasional tongue of flame flickered brightly as it leapt into sudden life, and then fell back, leaving the corners to their old shadows again.

A nervous tremor had seized upon Eugénie, it seemed as if some haunting presence were hovering around her. She looked suddenly round towards the door although she had heard no faintest sound, and it was with hardly a shock of surprise that she saw, or thought she saw, her husband's face and form dimly outlined in the dusky doorway.

It seemed to her, in this mystic moment, that she had known she would see a ghost. She heard not the hound's low whine of joy, his bound of dumb

welcome—her eyes were fixed upon the apparition, and she rose to obey its mute gesture of summons.

She was cold, tremulous, passive; but it was not fear that held her speechless. She felt as if she too were in the spirit, as if the strange, new life of the unseen world had already closed around her.

She rose and crossed the room; she followed the spectre into the dim corridor.

Then she felt her two hands seized in a strong, warm, living clasp. She felt herself held close and ever closer by a pair of encircling arms, and pressed to a heart whose beating she could feel and hear. She felt warm breath upon her cheek, and in her ear a voice, she had never thought to hear this side of the grave, sounded in tones of passionate love and thankfulness—

“Eugénie! My wife—my wife—my wife!”

She lay still upon his breast. She had neither the power nor the will to speak or move. Whether she were in the flesh or out of the flesh, whether in a dream or in reality, she could not think, nor did she seek to know. She was in her husband's arms, and she wished the spell might last for ever. No word or act of hers should break it.

How long she remained thus she knew not. His voice aroused her at last.

“Eugénie, have you no word for me? It is I—your husband returned to you from the dead. My wife! my wife! This hour atones for all.”

She knew then that it was no dream. Her white lips parted and she spoke—

“Lionel—husband.”

He kissed her brow and lips. He gazed into her fair face with hungry eyes. In the darkness they could hardly see one another, and yet they could not take

their eyes away. It seemed as if they doubted, even now, that this were not a dream.

Gradually assurance seemed given them by sight and touch.

"Lionel," she said tremulously, "it is really you? I am not dreaming it again?"

"No, no, my darling; no, no. I could almost believe the same myself; but thank God, it is a blessed reality."

"How?—when did you come?"

"Just now. I have ridden up from Baringham. No train stopped at Fontbury for three hours. I have just arrived. Nobody seemed to dare to break the news. I doubt if they trusted the evidence of their senses. I learned you were with John, and I came to you. They tell me he is——"

"Dying—yes."

Lionel put up his hand to his head.

"Eugénie," he said, "it seems to me that we live in a world of mysteries. Last night about ten o'clock—I was in my cabin and in my berth—it seemed to me that John came to me, and said, 'Make haste home, Lionel, I am going away. You must come to comfort the mother and Eugénie.' I was not sleeping—I cannot tell what it was I heard and saw—all seemed dream-like and indistinct; but I *felt* that I had been summoned to you, and that it was John's spirit that had been near me. And as I rode up through the storm, it seemed as if he were near, bidding me hasten on. Eugénie, I have come in time?"

"Ah yes, yes! He is dying, but he may linger yet. He said you were coming, were riding home. I thought he was wandering—Lionel, it seems as if his spirit were almost free. Will you come to him? It will not startle him now."

She led her husband within the room.

The fire fell inwards with a sudden sound, and a bright light filled the room. Sir John opened his eyes, and saw his brother.

"Lionel!" he said, "I knew you would soon be here."

The brothers clasped hands, and looked into each other's eyes. It seemed as if some strange, new bond bound them one to the other. Eugénie looked on, awed and wondering, the dream-like feeling stealing over her again.

"Thank God!" said Sir John at last, in his feeble tones. "You have come back to them. They will not be alone. I can say my 'nunc dimittis' now."

There was a long silence in the room—the silence of perfect thankfulness, that was in itself almost a prayer. Words seemed too weak at such a moment, to express the heartfelt gratitude that filled each soul.

Sir John was the first to speak.

"Eugénie," he said, "the mother must be told. I think I had better tell her."

"She will be here soon—she will not sleep long. She will come back to you when she wakes."

"Lionel, you are wet through," said Sir John. "Go into that next room; Eugénie will find you clothes; and get him something to eat, Eugénie, he is worn out with all this. Let the door stand half open, and when I call, bring him out to the mother."

It was Sir John now who led and planned. The others obeyed him as those who dream. Realisation comes but slowly in such moments, even when the understanding is satisfied.

An hour later, Lady Durley quietly entered her son's room. Save that the shaded lamp burned clearly and

softly, no visible change had passed over anything since her departure. Sir John was awake, and with more of consciousness in his look than he had evinced since his fainting fit last night.

“You are better, John?”

“Yes, mother. I have been dreaming. Some dreams do one good.”

“Yes?”

“I was dreaming of the future—of your future, mother. The picture was a pleasant one.”

There was no response.

“I saw you sitting in your accustomed chair, by your blazing hearth. I think it was Christmas time, by the holly on the walls and the brightness of everything. And your face was sad, mother, somewhat sad and aged; but it was very peaceful and contented too—as the face of one who has passed through trials, but also has had much consolation vouchsafed. It was the face of one whom God has comforted, both by the blessing of His good Spirit, and by the gift of a dutiful son and daughter.”

He paused for a moment, perhaps from weakness. Lady Durley said quietly,

“Do not weary yourself by talking, John. Dreams are but visionary things, hardly worth recounting. I will bear my trouble as patiently as I can, and God’s blessing will not, I trust, be denied me; but for the rest, He has thought fit to take both my sons away, and it is hard to say ‘Thy will be done.’”

“Have you not said it yet, mother?”

“I have, I do, I have conquered at last, and I do not, I will not murmur against God. Let Him do as He thinks good, He knows best.”

“Ah yes, how much best—how much.”

“And yet His ways are past finding out; but there is peace, even in submission.”

“And mother, when the lesson is learned; when we have said from our hearts, in face of some heavy trial, ‘Thy will be done;’ is not it sometimes the will of our Heavenly Father to restore what He seemed to take away?”

She looked at him searchingly.

“Can the dead rise?” she asked with a certain tremulous agitation in her voice. “Can those for whom the gates of death stand wide, turn aside and return? John, what do you mean?”

“I mean that the God, who is about to take your firstborn from you, will not in His great goodness leave you desolate and childless. He has spared to you one, whom we have mourned as dead.”

She gazed at him, as if unable to grasp the full meaning of his words.

“Lionel is dead,” she whispered hoarsely.

“We have thought so; but mother, we never had any certain tidings of his death. All we *knew* was that he was missing. The rest we imagined——”

Lady Durley rose in uncontrollable agitation.

“Tell me what you mean. I cannot bear this uncertainty. Where is my son?”

“Here, at home, safe amongst us, restored to the wife and mother who have mourned him so long. Mother, mother, God has been very good to us. Lionel has come back—he is here, to be your stay and support now, and through your whole life.”

Lady Durley turned suddenly at a slight sound behind her, and clasped her lost son in her arms. The dead was alive again—the lost was found.



CHAPTER XXXV.

FROM THE DEAD.

EUGÉNIE left them together, the mother and her two sons, and went to look at her sleeping child. Although she had been with her husband for more than an hour, she knew nothing as yet of the circumstances of his escape, nor how it was that, though still living, he had been unable to communicate with them. All that she would learn later; at first it had been enough to see him, to hear his voice, to minister to his physical wants, and to sit beside him holding his hand. Few words had as yet been exchanged between them. He had been very weary—too weary to do aught but watch her, with eyes full of a hungry love, whilst her heart was too full, and her mind too confused for speech to come readily.

Lionel looked thin and worn and aged—he looked like a man who had gone through much privation; but he was at home again now, with those who loved him and would care for him. All the suffering was over now; and very soon all the traces of past hardships would fade into oblivion.

Eugénie's trance of numb bewilderment was yielding at last to an intense thankful joy. As she looked upon

the face of her sleeping child, a rush of tears dazzled her eyes, and she fell on her knees beside his little bed, and poured out her whole soul in thanksgiving to God.

She rose refreshed and calmed, and bent over the boy and kissed him again and again.

"Not fatherless now, my little Gascoigne," she whispered again and again. "Not fatherless now. Oh my child, God has been wonderfully good to us. Let us show our gratitude by our whole future life. Ah! Gascoigne, you will not understand yet what you have gained—how much you have to be thankful for. God give me grace to teach you, as you grow up."

The restlessness of extreme happiness was upon Eugénie. She would not go back just yet to Sir John's room. She felt that the mother would want her newly-found son all to herself for a brief space; so she wandered down the stairs and into the hall, and answered, with a face full of tremulous brightness, the eager yet respectful questions put to her by the old butler, who could hardly yet believe that young "Master Lionel," as he was apt to call him, had really come back.

Eugénie's colour had deepened with excitement; her eyes shone with a strange, sweet light, she seemed transfigured, taken out of herself; never in her whole life had she looked more radiantly lovely.

Willoughby Beauchamp, coming in from the stormy darkness without, and seeing her standing in the full light of the lamps with that strange, exultant joy shining out from her eyes, fairly started at the sight of so fair an apparition.

"Good evening, Mrs. Durley," he said. "How has our patient been going on?"

She gave him her hand, although she had seen him

before that day ; the delicate colour deepened in her face, and then ebbed away.

"My husband has come back."

He looked at her in mute astonishment ; still holding her hand.

"Your husband !"

"Yes, Lionel. He came back this evening in the twilight. He is with John now."

He wrung her hand and released it.

"Mrs. Durley, I am glad," he said in his simple way.

"Thank you, I knew you would be. I wanted to tell you myself."

"I might have been tempted to doubt anyone else ; but your face is your witness."

Eugénie looked up with a curious smile.

"I do not know how to be thankful enough."

He gave her an answering look as he said,

"God looks into the heart. We have not to tell Him our gratitude. He knows without words."

"I am glad," she said, "for I have no words to express one tithe of mine."

After a brief silence she asked,

"Are you not going to John ?"

"Shall I not be intruding ?"

"No, not now. He would wish you to go up, I am sure. I will come with you."

They ascended the stairs together, and Eugénie led the way into the quiet room.

Lionel sat beside the bed, leaning upon one elbow and looking into his brother's face. Lady Durley was close to him on the other side, a new look of peaceful calm stamped upon her face, which seemed to deepen as she fed her hungry eyes with the sight of her long-lost son.

All three looked up as the door opened, and Lionel's eyes fixed themselves with eager intensity upon the face of his wife.

"Ah, Beauchamp," said Sir John, "you have come in spite of my prohibition? Well, I am glad of it, for I know you will sympathise with our joy, as you do with sorrow. My brother has come back to us—from the dead."

"I know—I am glad. I wish you all joy," and he held out his hand to Lionel.

Eugénie was standing now beside her husband, half encircled by his arm.

"He has been such a kind friend to me," she said softly. "He and his wife have done me so much good. I owe them very much."

Lionel pressed the hand held out with honest warmth.

Sir John looked on at the meeting with a glance of quiet contentment.

Willoughby looked at him the next.

"This has not been too much for you?"

"Not at all. I feel better."

"You look better."

"Joy does not kill a dying man, you see," he said with a smile.

In truth it seemed as if the happiness and satisfaction he had received from his brother's return, had gone far to rouse him from the torpor of exhaustion.

"You must not take liberties with yourself. You have no strength to spare," said Willoughby nevertheless, with his professional air.

"Nothing can hurt me now," answered Sir John with another of his quiet smiles. "You know that as well as I do."

"You must keep quiet," insisted Willoughby. "You must not tire nor excite yourself."

"I have done with excitement now," was the quiet response. "I have received all, and more than I dared to hope. Even the suspense, the waiting, is over now. All that is left me, is to lie here, and watch until the call comes. It will not be long now, and this is such peace."

They looked at him lovingly. It was indeed peace. Pain and grief and loss, all swept away; his mother no longer desolate, but surrounded by those who loved her, and whom she loved. It seemed in truth as if he had nothing left to wish for; as if the peace that passeth all understanding was already overshadowing him.

"Lionel was going to tell us the story of his escape," said Sir John at length, breaking the silence that followed his last words. "Will you sit down and hear it too?"

Willoughby glanced at Lady Durley.

"We shall be glad for you to hear it, Dr. Beauchamp," she said courteously. "People will be very curious, and it will be a relief to us, that there is somebody besides ourselves, who can give them the true story."

"Do stay," said Eugénie pleadingly. "I want you to know all—and Constance."

So Willoughby sat down, and Lionel began his story.

He was not very clear on all points; but as far as he understood the matter it stood thus—

He had been severely wounded in the first action, and left for dead; but when his men came to identify and bury the dead, he was not found. The reason of this was, that he had been carried off, whilst insensible,

by some natives of a neighbouring tribe; and he came to his senses only to find himself in a sort of captivity. He was very ill for a long time—weeks passed by, and he still lay at death's door. The rude accommodation, the coarse, scanty food, the intense heat of the weather, all combined to retard his recovery, and it was almost a marvel that he battled through to health again.

His position as regards his captors, he could not quite understand, for he could only speak a few words of their language. They seemed simple, quiet people, and in their own indifferent fashion they were kind to him; but they evidently had no intention of allowing him to escape. He was looked upon as a possible enemy, whom it was necessary to keep under restraint. He had no means of communicating with the outer world. He endured all the misery of knowing that he must be given up for lost, and mourned as dead by those he loved best at home. He saw no hope as yet, of escaping from the captivity in which he was held, and only the languor of ill-health kept him from working himself into a fever of impatience and despair, or from making some rash attempt at escape, which must, in all probability, have cost him his life.

Rescue came at length a month ago, suddenly and unexpectedly, in the arrival of a small detachment of English troops, upon some surveying business, without a suspicion of finding a countryman in captivity.

Lionel was rescued only to find his suspicions verified, his name lost from the land of the living, his place in his regiment filled up, his very existence, as it were, a thing of the past. Lionel Durley had died four months ago!

His health was too much shattered for him to dream

of taking up his old life ; and he yearned for his own home, and for those whom he loved who were mourning him as dead.

He reported himself at headquarters ; made sure that the news of his reappearance should not find its way into the telegrams, and took the first vessel for England.

“ Why did you not wish us to hear by telegram ? ” asked Lady Durley.

“ Because I feared the shock and uncertainty and suspense would be more painful than joyful. I knew that the first edge of your grief must be already worn off—I could not spare you that ; but telegrams are uncertain things, and are often contradicted—I feared if you heard of me in that way, you would not know what to believe, and would only endure an agony of suspense, which my appearance in the flesh has saved you. I did not know how things were going here—what state John’s health was in—or yours, mother ; or Eugénie’s. I feared a shock for one and all ; and I thought too, that if I too had to die before reaching home, it would be better, far better, that you should not know I was alive, until you heard of my second death. It would have spared you something.”

“ Were you so very ill ? ” asked Willoughby ; whilst Eugénie clasped his thin hand closely in both of hers.

“ I had to be carried on board at Bombay. The journey down country brought back the fever and weakness. It was intermittent to a certain extent ; but it pulled me down almost to death’s door again. The doctor gave me a hope—but that was all.”

“ And then ? ”

“ And then the sea voyage made a new man of me. The sea always was my great delight, and by the end of

the first week I could pace the decks with the best of them. Appetite and power of sleep returned—you know eating and sleeping are the chief occupations on ship-board, and when I landed to-day in Southampton, I felt that I was my old self once again."

So that was Lionel's story—the story of him who had returned to them as from the dead. It was simply told, without any striving after effect, or appeal for pity, without any lamentations over his past sufferings, or vivid pictures of what he had endured. It was a simple story, told in a manly, self-contained fashion, and yet it brought home to his hearers a sense of how infinitely more trying, more painful, more wearying the past months had been for him than for them.

Eugénie felt as if she had never yet loved or revered her husband enough.

She wanted him to herself, she wanted him alone; and she drew him gently towards the door.

"Good-bye," she said to Willoughby, "we will leave you to talk to your patient. I shall come to see Constance very soon."

And then she led Lionel away.

"You must come and see the child," she said.

"Ah, the little chap! How often I have thought of him—wondering if ever I should see him again, or you. This is not a sweet dream, Eugénie? I have been so often here in spirit, watching you, talking to you, holding your hand as I hold it now. I shall not wake to find it all the delirium of fever?"

She pressed his hand upon her lips.

"God has sent you back to us, dear love. You need not be afraid of the happiness He sends."

He paused and looked at her. They had reached

the shelter of her own warm, bright room now. The door was closed upon them, and they could look their fill. Little did Eugénie know how sweetly yet strangely her last words had fallen upon her husband's ear.

It was so long, as it seemed to her, that she had thought and spoken familiarly of God, that she forgot the days when He had been little more than a name to her, a name that had seldom passed her lips. She had little known how this reserve had been noted by her husband. He had believed that it was reserve and not indifference that held her silent; but he had deplored that reserve, and wondered how it was that it did not melt as the years passed on.

His own faith was too simple and firm to make it easy for him to doubt hers. God was to him as much a Father as an earthly parent could be. He did not speak freely and easily of his religious beliefs. His instinct of reverence kept him silent where he believed speech would only produce mockery and profanity; and Eugénie's reserve had sealed his lips to some extent even in her presence. He feared to intrude upon the sacred threshold of a heart not opened to him. In his manly devotion to his fair young wife, he doubted not that her soul was tenfold more full of love than his own, and that it was intense depth of feeling that kept her silent. When he did talk to her, she looked at him with a gentle sweetness that spoke, he thought, more eloquently than words. He had had no fears on her account.

Now, however, he looked at her with a glad smile.

"Ah, Eugénie, that does me good! That does me good. Wife, do you remember your last present to me—before we knew of our parting?—a little Shakespeare birthday book. It seems an odd thing to say; but

some lines I read there to-day—the lines that belong to the day, seem to express what we must feel, as well as if they came from the great Book itself. See! I have kept it through everything. It lives always next my heart.”

He took it from his breast—the little travel-stained volume, worn with friction and soiled with use. He turned to the passage he had spoken of, and read it aloud in his clear steady tones,

“‘God’s goodness hath been great to thee ;
Never let day nor night unhallow’d pass,
But still remember what the Lord hath done.’”

Then they looked at each other again with deep feeling in the glance.

“Lionel,” said Eugénie. “I have learned my lesson whilst you have been away. When I had you—you were my all, you were my religion ; but when God took you away, He came to me Himself, and took away the heart of stone, and made me glad, with that gladness that only He can give. I never went to Him in the old days. My sins did not seem to weigh me down then ; but when they did—ah, the burden was more than I could bear !”

“And you had not to bear it—it has been borne for you already by One who loves you.”

“I know—I know—‘Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.’ Ah, I have found how true these words are. I was very long in finding the way to Him. I did not understand how to go. Lionel, it was our little boy’s baby lips that gave the clue—you know the words ‘Just as I am’—I heard him lisp his lesson out, and what a lesson it was to me ! I went to

Him without one plea, save that His Blood was shed for me. You know whether or not I was received. He taught me to pray for His guiding Spirit—and now He has given me everything—even my husband whom He seemed to take away.”

“ Ah, Eugénie—‘seemed.’ Perhaps He parted us that we might learn to look to Him ; perhaps we were somewhat too much wrapped up in one another. I, too, have felt His Fatherly love and goodness more vividly, more nearly, in these months of trial and sickness, than I think I could have done elsewhere. And now that we have both learned our lessons, He has given us back to one another.”

Eugénie’s tears fell slowly—tears of pure love and gratitude.

“ Lionel,” she said, “ let us try never to forget. Let us try to thank Him by our lives.”

“ We will,” he answered gently : “ and now take me to see my boy.”





CHAPTER XXXVI.

GREETINGS AND FAREWELLS.

“**A**ND so you have turned up again—like a bad half-penny—just as we had all settled down to a comfortable state of resignation.” This was Mr. Mason’s greeting, two days later, and the old man thrust out his lower lip and drew his bushy eyebrows together with an assumption of indifference, which quickly gave way. A sudden softening smoothed out the wrinkles from brow and lips, and Lionel found his hand warmly grasped and shaken. .

“God bless you, lad, God bless you. I thank Him from my heart that I have lived to see this day.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Lionel with feeling. “I am more glad than I can say to find you still here, in your wonderful old-new house. I have come here with many purposes in my head, not the least of these is my wish to thank you for your kindness to my wife and the little chap there. They have had so much to say of it.”

“Tut-tut-tut—pooh-pooh. Women and children never had much sense. I did nothing—I never do—save just to amuse myself. It’s a great mistake ever to think of other people, as you’ll find when you are as old as I. I never do—on principle.”

Lionel smiled as he looked round him.

"Ah, I see, I understand."

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," said the old man with great heartiness, "and tell me all about yourself."

"You mustn't call my father a boy," put in Gascoigne's small voice in a tone of grave reproof. The child had followed Lionel about like a shadow ever since his presence had been made known to him. "He is a great big man, and a soldier. When I grow up, I'm going to be just like him."

There was a sufficiently strong likeness already between the bronzed, thin-faced man and the blooming, beautiful boy. Mr. Mason studied the two countenances with his keen, deep-set eyes, and his face softened to gentleness.

"Lionel," he said, "that boy has stuff in him—the stuff that the best and the worst are made from. If ever a child needed a father's authority and example, that one does. His mother, with all her love and tenderness and beauty of character, will never gain the ascendancy over him that a parent should have. His nature is of tougher, coarser fibre than hers. He will want an iron hand over him—the hand of a strong, just, immovable father. With a father's controlling authority, and a mother's tenderness and devotion, the lad ought to turn out a credit to his parents and to his country, brought up as he will be in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Lionel looked down into his child's intelligent face, where lines indicative of self-will and defiance already began to make themselves visible, and his face put on a look of serious, loving gravity.

"Father," said Gascoigne with his most earnest look,

"I am going to be good. I've been naughty very often to Mamsey ; but I'm going to be good always now. I'm going to grow like you. Mamsey has put it in my prayers now. So I sha'n't ever forget."

Whilst Lionel and the old man talked together, with and over the child, Eugénie was occupied not far away, by an eager talk with Mrs. Willoughby Beauchamp.

Constance was still the same serene, quiet, self-contained being as of old ; but there was a new happiness shining now in the clear depths of her eyes, and brightness in her smile, and a sweet vivacity in the play of expression that was new, and gave an added charm to the fair face, which had worn in past days a look of almost too great seriousness.

Constance was not the only person changed by the marriage. Her husband showed himself just sufficiently different, to convince all the world of the gain his life had received.

Just that softening, humanising touch that his nature wanted had been given to it now. The gravity and earnestness that might have grown hard, or even harsh, were now in no danger of doing so. Kindly and sympathetic his true nature had always been ; but he had been in danger once, of losing the power of genial expression of his feelings. In trying to crush one love out of his heart, he had been in sore peril of uprooting much that was fair and good. Now, however, that the deepest and best love was allowed to grow and flourish, other lovely things grew likewise in its shadow, and Willoughby's whole nature expanded upwards and outwards in comprehensive love to all around.

Eugénie's understanding had not yet grasped the meaning of the change of which she was dimly, yet

distinctly aware; but she could see in Constance's sweet face the evidence of a deep happiness, and she rejoiced to think that others were sharing the same intense joy that had brightened her own life so suddenly and unexpectedly.

The kiss exchanged by the two wives was very full of meaning. It expressed so much, that for some few moments words seemed unnecessary.

Constance was the first to speak.

"Oh Eugénie; you know that I have been sharing your joy with you."

"I do, I do. Ah, Constance, we little thought how it would end, when you taught me to bear my sorrow—showed me where to take it."

"I?"

"Yes, you—all of you; your husband and little Lily, and those whom you had taught. My trouble and loss led me to God, and now He has given my husband back to me. I do not know how to thank Him enough."

Constance smiled and pressed her hand.

"He will show you in His good time."

There was a brief silence, which Constance broke by a new question,

"And Sir John?"

"He lies still in the same state—perfectly conscious, but so weak, that every day we think may snap the thread. He is so tranquil and happy, that it is beautiful to see him. It seems as if he had no wish left ungratified. He is waiting for 'the call' as peacefully as a little child."

"And Lady Durley?"

"The dear mother? It seems as if she had caught his spirit from him. I think these days of quiet, pain-

less sinking have been the greatest comfort to her. She has had time to realise what the gain to him will be—to enter a little into his feelings, and to understand his longing for the rest that awaits him. It seems at times as though his spirit were more in heaven than on earth ; and I am sure she would not choose to hold him here longer, even if she could. Lionel has come back to her—God has restored one of her sons, as it were, from the dead, and I am sure she does not murmur at being called upon to resign the other into His hands. It is such peace for both, now that the struggle is over. She seldom leaves him. Hour after hour she sits beside him, holding his hand and talking to him from time to time, in low tones, or reading to him words which seem to bear new meanings with each repetition. Ah yes, they are very happy ; and I think that when the end does come, as soon it must, the remembrance of these last tranquil days of peace and love, will be the best balm and consolation. It will help her and all of us to realise more than ever that he is not lost, but only gone before.”

“I am so glad—so glad. We have all so often wondered what would become of poor Lady Durley when she lost Sir John. We little thought what a loving and well-loved son and daughter she would have to comfort her. There was a tradition current that the soldier son would not be likely to settle at home during his mother’s lifetime.”

“I believe,” said Eugénie, with a momentary hesitation, “that Lionel and his mother did not fully understand one another once ; and his marriage made a kind of break between them ; but all that is past now ; and it was never as bad as was represented, I am convinced.”

"So I always said," answered Constance with a bright smile. "And now, look round, and tell me how you like my new home?"

"It is beautiful. You have made quite a picture of it. I am glad you use this grand old hall as a sitting-room. Constance, how does the *ménage* act? I was never more astonished in my life than I was just now, when I saw Mr. Mason sitting by your tea-tray in that delightful velvet coat. Why, he looks like some quaint old picture. How handsome he is, now that his thread-bare coats and that old greasy skull-cap are replaced by velvet. I never saw such a change in anyone; and he seems able to talk at ease now, even amid all the resources of civilisation."

"Of course he can. His savage habits are only the growth of years—affectation I call it, and I am very severe. He is made to come to meals at stated times, and to wash his hands and keep his beautiful white hair brushed and combed. He growls and groans and grumbles—and likes it immensely. He plays the martyr from morning till night when we are at him, and sighs for the seclusion and peace of his den; but strange to say, when we are too busy to give him our undivided attention, he seldom takes advantage or makes good his escape. He sits for the most part in that high-backed oak chair there, by the fire, when not in the garden, and watches all that goes on; and if he is left long alone, he generally comes lounging along in search of somebody. A fine hypocrite is old uncle, as I frequently inform him—for ever groaning after his lost peace and solitude, yet never contented unless somebody is at hand to entertain him."

Eugénie laughed.

"I can just imagine it. I thought it would be so,

though hardly perhaps so soon. Who is the favourite, you or your husband?"

"I am supposed to be; but I know he thinks a tremendous deal of Willoughby. They are for ever arguing and differing, but are the best of friends."

"And the dogs?"

"Oh the dogs are an institution—we do not attempt to interfere. They are perfectly well behaved—wipe their feet on the mat before coming in, and are never in the way. You can see an assortment here at present, and they have their own quarters at the back too. We shall not replace them as they die off; but we should never dream of banishing the old inhabitants. Ah, and here is Lucile—her first visit. I hope old uncle will not take to be cantankerous!"

Constance rose quickly from her seat to greet her cousin, who had just arrived, daintily arrayed in brown velvet and sable, which made her look peculiarly youthful and piquant.

"You dear creature, how sweet it is to have you back!" was her greeting to her hostess. "You simply can't imagine how dismal we are at the park without you. Life seems a waste and a howling wilderness; the children are cross, and I am crosser. We shall never get right till you have set us going again. I am sure Frank must begin to wish he had married you instead of me. Eugénie! This is a delight! My dear, darling child, I just sha'n't try to tell you what I felt when I heard the news. If I did I should cry again, as I did then—and crying ruins my complexion. And is this your husband? What am I to say to you? Words seem such silly, meaningless little things, especially from a silly little creature like myself. There, I shall not try to say anything—only I am a wife and a

mother, and I know a little what it must feel like. I do believe I am crying after all ! How tiresome !” and Lucile pressed her cambric web to the eyes, in which some tears of genuine feeling sparkled. “ I am one of those stupid, shallow people who always must laugh or cry, just as the impulse takes. I suppose my eyes look like boiled gooseberries now, don’t they, Constance ? And I pride myself on my eyes ; and I had taken such pains to get myself up nicely, just to soften the heart of that delightful old man, to whom I have behaved so shamefully badly.”

They all laughed, they could not help it. There was something in Lucile’s manner that provoked mirth. Under cover of that laugh, she faced suddenly about and walked straight up to Mr. Mason, who sat still in his high-backed chair, scowling at her from under his bushy eyebrows, with his under lip thrust threateningly far out.

“ And who are you, pray ? ” he asked as she placed herself before him.

“ Oh, you know that as well as I do. We do not need any introductions. I know I was rude and behaved abominably ; but I am certain you paid me back in my own coin, with interest and compound interest, in the matter of unflattering remarks, so I do not feel called upon to make any very humble apology. Still I do think it would be best for us to make friends—just for Constance’s peace and comfort ; and you have done me such an irreparable wrong, that I am sure you ought to to feel avenged, and can afford to be magnanimous now.”

“ A wrong—I—? ” growled Mr. Mason. “ And pray how do you make that out, madam ? ”

“ Oh very easily, you have simply defrauded me of Constance——”

"I! Upon my word, madam, you have a cool impudence of your own! I indeed! Pray what about the husband?"

"Oh, Willoughby doesn't count. Willoughby is just nothing. They were like two halves of a puzzle—no use at all till they were joined. I have been worrying for years to get them married; but it is you who have spoilt all my nice plan."

"Your plan indeed! And pray what was that?"

"Why to have them live in that house of ours close to the park—we should have made a private way between the houses, and I should have had Constance as much almost as before; and her house and affairs to look after and spoil as well as my own. Now you have just spoilt everything as far as I am concerned. Of course it is very delightful for Constance to be lodged like a princess, and to escape from my tongue, which must have driven her half crazy many a time before now. I am quite aware that you have been very generous to her. But you don't expect me to be grateful to you for that, do you?—and you have behaved abominably as far as I am concerned. You have made havoc of a happy home, and you won't even make friends!"

Eugénie and Lionel were making their adieus. Their faces wore a smile as they shook hands with Constance.

"I think the danger is past," said Eugénie. "No fear of Lucile's not making her way, wherever she has a mind to."

"Dear Lucile!" said Constance affectionately, "she may not be an ideal woman; but she has always been the kindest of sisters to me."

"And a kind friend to me," added Eugénie; putting aside the thoughts of those bitter, jealous suspicions which Lucile's fluent tongue had raised into life, and

which had not died without having wrought some mischief. "Yes, Constance, Lucile is very sweet and dear; I shall never forget her goodness to me."

So they went back to the silent home, where one whom they loved lay dying.

It was as Eugénie had said, such a tranquil, peaceful close to a life of so much pain, that no one could really murmur, no heart feel to grudge him the rest for which he had so patiently waited.

Lady Durley watched continually beside her son; but the bitterness was all gone now. She knew that the hour had come in which she would have to bow to the will of God, and give up her son to His keeping. It was an hour to which she had looked forward with an intense, shrinking dread for many a long year, and had pictured to herself with feelings akin to despair; and yet, now that the hour had come, she was filled with so deep a sense of God's sustaining love, that she could yield up what He asked without one rebellious sigh, and say from her heart, "It is well."

It was not simply that God had restored one son to her, and therefore she would not murmur, even when He claimed the other. No. Deep as was her thankfulness for the mercy shown her, her resignation had a deeper root yet.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life."

Yes, that was it—that was the knowledge that had sunk so deeply into her nature—a full realisation of God's love in giving up His Son for the sins of the world—of the Son's love in becoming a willing sacrifice for that guilty world. If God could do this for His children, could not His children do something for Him.

It was little indeed He asked—their little finite love in return for His boundless wealth of His—their small submissions in return for the very life—the cheerful bearing of little crosses, when He had borne His heavy one without one murmur.

Surely He did not ask much. Surely the help and support He gave, more than made up for any little loss they might sustain.

“I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me,” said one great man; and surely we can all do much through that same upholding power.

Lady Durley had found that she was able to give up her son without a murmur, in the strength of a newly awakened, fervent love towards God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

And now the very day and hour had come—the quiet sunset hour of a November day—the sunset hour also of a quiet, noble life.

They knew that he was dying. They stood beside his bed, looking down at the thin, white face that wore so beautiful a look of peace.

The ruddy light of a winter sunset streamed into the room, and lit up the face of the dying man with a curious radiance.

“Is the little chap there?” he asked faintly. “I should like to kiss him again.”

The boy was not far away. His father fetched him, and lifted him upon the bed.

“Little chap,” said Sir John with a smile. “I am going away. I want to say good-bye before I go.”

“Are you going to heaven, Uncle John?” asked Gascoigne seriously.

“I hope so, my child.”

“Will you see God when you get there?” the

childish face had put on a look of deep gravity not untinged with awe.

"I trust by His great mercy that even I may see His face."

"Will you tell Him then, please, about *how* glad we are that He let father come back. I do tell Him in my prayers; but you could say it better, if you saw Him. Tell Him I am trying to be a good boy, and ask Him to help me."

"Gascoigne," said Sir John earnestly, "will you promise me something, and try hard to keep your promise?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"Promise me never to give up praying to God—never to stop saying your prayers every morning and every night—and try all you know, with all your might and main, never to be ashamed of loving God, and asking His help and blessing in all you do."

"I promise," said Gascoigne readily, but not carelessly. "Father says his prayers always. I want to be like father."

"God grant you may. Kiss me now, my boy; and do not quite forget Uncle John. Grow up a brave, good man, as those whose name you bear have been before you. Keep your armour bright, your name stainless, your honour untarnished. You have a good father and a good mother—try to be worthy of them,—and the Lord God Almighty bless and keep you evermore!"

He laid his feeble hands upon the boy's head, and Gascoigne clasped his little arms about his neck and kissed him wonderingly and tearfully—awed and impressed by the solemnity of all about him. Then Lionel lifted him down, and gently pushed him from the room.

"He shall not forget you, John," said Eugénie with deep feeling. "He shall not forget the promise he has made, nor your last charge. God helping him and us,

he shall grow up to be worthy of the name he bears—your name.”

Sir John looked at her with a smile.

“I am glad I have known you, Eugénie. Mother, she is a true Durley, is she not?”

“Yes, my son.”

“And will be a true daughter to you?”

“Ay, truly she will.”

His eyes sought Eugénie and her husband.

“You will take care of the mother—Lionel, I leave her especially to you; for you must take my place. Eugénie has her own—the place of a dear daughter. You will take care of her—love her—comfort her? I need not ask it—I know you will.”

“We will indeed love and cherish her; but no one can fill your place, John.”

He smiled faintly, and looked again at Lady Durley.

“You are willing to let me go, mother?”

“Yes, my son.”

“I know you are. You would not keep me from my rest. Thank God for me that it is so near.”

His eyes closed; his breath grew short. They bent over him, and kissed his cold lips.

At the touch his eyes opened, and he smiled, as one who suddenly wakes from sleep.

The sun had just touched the wooded hill behind which it was about to sink. His eyes looked at it, and then sought Eugénie’s face.

“Ah,” he murmured, “is it not true?—the shadow is the best.”

And then he looked at his mother; murmured her name once, and closed his eyes as if in sleep.

From that sleep he did not wake again, save in the land of rest, whither his weary spirit had fled,



CHAPTER XXXVII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

AND so, mother, you found a daughter in my Eugénie?" said Lionel.

"Ay, my son, I did indeed."

The mother gently stroked the fair head of her daughter, and looked with a tender smile into the sweet face so near her own. Eugénie had learned to know now the blessing of a mother's love.

It was now a year since they had laid to rest one whom they had greatly loved and honoured, and the threads of daily life had again been gathered up; a new baronet had quietly stepped into the place of the old, and Sir Lionel Durley was striving, with an earnest single-hearted purpose, to make up to all about him, and especially to his mother, for the heavy loss they had sustained in the death of Sir John.

And one look into Lady Durley's calm, gentle face, was enough to convince most people that his efforts had not been unsuccessful.

She looked older than she had done a year ago. The face that had for so long retained its smoothness, and a portion of its bloom, had grown faded and wrinkled at last; and yet Lady Durley was more beautiful to look

at in her old age, than she had been in her youth. For the hard lines had smoothed themselves out, the handsome, high-bred face had exchanged its look of haughty pride for one of calm dignity, and serene gravity. The storms of life had swept over her very soul, she had been tried in the furnace of sorrow, and had come out from the trial purged from all dross—even as gold is purified by fire.

How her son and daughter loved and revered her, it would be hard to say. Her steadfast courage in the hour of sore trial, and her beautiful resignation in her bereavement, filled their hearts with an intense admiration and devotion. They felt they could not do enough for one, who so generously and nobly laid aside her own deep sorrow, to sympathise in their newly-found happiness in each other.

Yes, Lionel and Eugénie were very, very happy, with a calm sweet happiness that grew more intense each day. The death of Sir John had seemed to throw a cloud over their first re-union, had checked the spontaneous outburst of joy that else had filled their hearts. All had then seemed strange and solemn almost to sadness; but they were reaping now their harvest of joy.

It was Christmas Eve, the twilight was drawing on, and the mother was alone with her children.

There had been a gay meeting of friends at Linley Castle an hour or two earlier. Constance and Willoughby had driven over to bear their Christmas greetings to the Durleys and—wonderful to relate—had brought old Mr. Mason with them!

“It is the first time, for more years than I can count, that I have been outside my own garden,” he had said to Lady Durley, bowing before her with the courtly air

of a by-gone generation, "but I could not allow this season to pass by, madam, without doing myself the pleasure and the honour of conveying to you by word of mouth, my sense of deep sympathy with your recent loss, and my sincere hope that the future may make reparation for the past."

Lady Durley had seemed more pleased and interested by Mr. Mason's visit, his reminiscences of past days, and his quaint anecdotes of the far-back Durleys, than she had been by anything since Sir John's death. She and the old man parted on the best of terms, and with the mutual wish to meet again.

But before this farewell, Lucile had arrived with her husband and children; and the hall had echoed to the ringing laughter and merry voices of the little ones.

Lady Durley accepted her daughter's friends with gentle cordiality now. Lucile no longer held aloof, or spoke with irritation and annoyance of the treatment she received at Linley Castle. On the contrary, she spoke of the dowager as a "charming old lady," and paid court to her with the pretty grace and ease so natural to her.

"Your friend Mrs. Beauchamp is a winning little creature," Lady Durley had once remarked to Eugénie. "There is something fascinating about her; but I still prefer the quiet, undemonstrative Mrs. Willoughby. There is a sterling worth about her which commands confidence and respect."

And Eugénie had agreed in this verdict.

Dr. Beauchamp and his wife were welcome guests at any time in this home, and very cordial relations existed between him and the stately Lady Durley, who had once held him in such small estimation.

'This meeting at Linley Castle on Christmas Eve had been a very bright and pleasant thing; and each guest had returned home feeling as if some new sense of glad goodwill had been gained by an insight into the calm gladness of that peaceful household. Christmas would most certainly be kept there in its truest and highest sense.

And now the last of the guests had gone; and twilight had stolen upon the three who were left alone in the gathering darkness.

Eugénie was kneeling at her mother's feet, looking up into the wrinkled face with her sweet, shining eyes. The heavy widow's dress was gone now, and the mourning she wore for Sir John did not seem to weigh down the slight, graceful figure as the weeds had done. The fair face too, was changed, for the look of settled sadness had vanished, and the old bloom and loveliness had quite come back; only that loveliness was now enhanced by the pure sweetness of the expression, which the happiness of this world alone can never bestow.

To the two loving ones who were gazing now into the earnest face, it seemed as if its exquisite beauty could not be matched in all the world.

"And so, mother, you found a daughter in my Eugénie?" said Lionel.

And Lady Durley's answer was quietly emphatic.

"Ay, my son, I did, indeed."

And then she looked into Eugénie's face with a smile, and added,

"But we did not understand one another all at once, did we, my child?"

"I was very blind, very wrong," said Eugénie humbly. "I have often wondered at myself since."

"Nay, dear child, the fault was mine too. If you were blind, so also was I. We misunderstood many things in those days; but we have forgotten all that now."

"I shall never forget your goodness to me and my child," answered Eugénie impulsively, "nor forgive my jealous coldness."

Lionel listened in a little surprise. Eugénie had not yet told him the whole history of her early trials and troubles, on her arrival at the new home.

"Then you were not always as you are now?" he asked. "I thought Eugénie would win her way to all hearts at once," said he.

"Ah!" answered his wife, looking up at him with a smile half sad, and wholly sweet, "you always thought much too well of Eugénie—you did not know all her faults."

"Did I not? I always thought that my wife was a pearl among women?"

"So she is," said Lady Durley softly.

Eugénie looked up gratefully.

"You are all so good to me. It humbles me to hear you say such things; but it is very sweet too. Lionel—dearest mother—I pray to God every day to make me more worthy of the love you give me, and to guide me with His Spirit in the daily round of duties which my life holds for me. I feel so little fitted for the place I occupy, and I so greatly long to do right. I always did wish that; but I used not to know to whom to go for help and guidance; and even when I learned the lesson, there were so many stumbling-blocks in my path, so many little cherished sins it was so hard to give up. Ah, you do not know how self-willed, proud and resent-

ful I was. I am ashamed to think of those days myself; but I know it is all forgiven—here and above too; and I will try—oh, I will indeed!—God helping me, to be what He and you would wish me.”

“Dear child—my sweet daughter—God has given you to be my greatest blessing in my old age. He will continue to bless His servants who put their trust in Him.”

“And He in His great love will spare us, mother, to be your stay and support and comfort during all your future life,” added Lionel, laying his hand tenderly upon his mother’s head. “In His great mercy; I fully believe, He will lay no further load of loss and sorrow upon you.”

“Let Him do whatsoever seemeth good to Him,” answered Lady Durley with deep feeling. “Never again can I doubt His Fatherly love and care.”

The eloquent silence that followed these words was broken by the entrance of Gascoigne, who came to say his good-nights. He had a big stocking of his father’s tightly clasped in his hands, which he displayed with a triumphant laugh.

“See, Grandy, see! It holds *four* times as much as mine!”

Lady Durley held him in her arms, and looked fondly into his bright face.

“This is the second Christmas you have spent in this home, little chap. Are you going to be very happy and good?”

“Oh yes, Grandy. I’m going to be good always now—I mean I’m going to *try* always. I promised Uncle John.”

“You will always remember Uncle John?”

“Oh yes. He was kind and good; he gave me my pony. I love him. I sha’n’t never forget him.”

"Nor the promise you made him?"

"Oh no. I'll always say my prayers, and *never* be ashamed of them;" and the bold boy face looked resolute and almost manly. "I want to grow up like father and Uncle John. They aren't never ashamed of anything."

"Have you anything to say to me to-night, Gascoigne; or have you been too busy to learn a text?"

"I've learned one—I learned it all by myself—Nurse told me the words. I found it in Mother's Bible. She had a flower pressed there, and it was marked—I *think* it must be a favourite. Mamsey taught me one too—a little one for Christmas Day. Shall I say them both?"

He stood before the little group, who watched him with loving eyes, and crossing his hands behind him, he said slow and distinctly,

"'And a Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'

"'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'"

THE END.

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